

**EGYPTIAN SELF-DEFINITION IN THE NEW KINGDOM AND THE
COPTIC PERIOD**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into self-definition during two contrasting periods in Egypt's past. It consists of five chapters, plus a conclusion. Chapter 1 introduces the thesis, putting the topic into its historiographical background, and gives it a theoretical framework. The thesis then falls into two sections, which mirror each other, using the same types of source material. First, the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE) is investigated, and then the Coptic period (fourth to ninth centuries CE).

Chapter 2 assesses New Kingdom textual sources, in particular letters. Statements of self made by different members of the literate society are examined. The inconsistencies within the source material are highlighted, as is a high degree of conformity. In Chapter 3, New Kingdom Memphis is investigated. The impact of official ideologies on the Memphite population is assessed, as witnessed by the temple complexes, a royal palace, the harbour areas, a residential location (Kom el Rabi'a) and the pyramid fields.

In Chapter 4, it is seen that a variety of foci could be appealed to by a literate Egyptian seeking to define her/himself in Coptic Egypt. As in Chapter 2, letters are the focus of study, revealing a range of opinions. Chapter 5 tests the rigid self-definition seen in the writings of the Christian hierarchy against the urban site of Coptic Thebes. An analysis is made of the intensive occupation which occurred in the floodplain and the surrounding desert. In conclusion, a comparison is drawn between New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt, and the validity of ideological statements concerning self-definition is considered.

CONTENTS

Abbreviations and preliminary note	12
Acknowledgements	13
 Chapter One - Introduction	 14
A historiographical and theoretical setting	15
Bringing the past to life	18
Controversial identities	26
Self-definition	35
Ideology	44
Absorbing the background and reaching the sources	46
Chapter Two - Self-definition in the New Kingdom textual world	48
The context	48
The literate world	51
Textual boundaries	55
Letters	60
The delineation of the world	66
The royal context	66
Sources of instability	72
Outside the immediate royal context	76
The apex of the ordered world	86
The establishment of hierarchy	86
The expression of discontent	88
Differentiation within the Egyptian world	94
Disdain for the non-familiar	95
Maintenance of the familiar	105
Terms of exclusivity and difference	108
Facing apparent ideological failure	110

Public disorder	110
Failure to live as an Egyptian should	113
Conclusion	114
Chapter Three - New Kingdom Memphis	117
Studying the ancient urban environment	117
Cities in ancient Egypt	119
Memphis	123
Memphis as described in textual sources	124
The foci of Memphis	128
Great temple complex of Ptah	129
Tracing the religious beliefs of the Memphites	133
The sacred environment	142
Royal residences	143
Harbour areas	146
Perunefer	148
Kom el Rabi'a	154
Domestic identities	157
Domestic pursuits	162
Domestic adornments	164
Life in RAT	166
Memphis as a setting for pilgrimage	167
Conclusion	175
Chapter Four - Self-definition in the Coptic textual world	177
From the New Kingdom to the Coptic	177
The reasons	177
Background and approach	178
The intervening years	181
The Coptic period	185
The literate world	189

Textual boundaries	195
Letters	201
Christian vs non-Christian letters	202
Formulae	204
Context	205
The delineation of the world	207
The powerful	207
Potential destabilising influences	210
The apex of the ordered world	220
Establishment of hierarchy	220
Sinful self as opposed to virtuous other	224
Differentiation within the Egyptian world	227
The formation and maintenance of communities	227
Language as a device of exclusion	231
The familial	232
The vulnerable	234
Facing apparent ideological failure	239
The struggle to maintain a Christian identity	239
Exclusion	240
Public disorder	243
Conclusion	248
Chapter Five - Coptic Thebes	251
Cities in Coptic Egypt	251
Thebes	253
The starting point	256
Sources	257
East bank	260
Luxor temple	260
Karnak temple	264

West bank	266
Desert edge/floodplain settlements	268
Djeme	269
Ramesseum	277
Temple of Seti I	278
Desert occupations/settlements	280
The Qurn	281
Deir el Roumi	283
Deir el Medina and Deir Kurnet Murrai	286
Site VII	289
Sheikh Abd el-Qurna	290
Deir el Bahri	294
Valley of the Kings	297
Deir el Bakhit	298
Quarry settlement	299
Thoth Hill	300
The pilgrimage landscape of Thebes	302
Conclusion	307
Conclusion	310
Bibliography	315
Appendix - Maps, texts and illustrations	356
Figure 1 Egypt, showing ancient sites, the oases, eastern Mediterranean and the Sudan	356
Figure 2 Egypt, showing ancient sites and location of mountainous areas	357
Figure 3 Ptolemaic and Byzantine Egypt	358
Figure 4 Islamic (post-conquest Egypt)	359
Figure 5 Poetical stela of Thutmose III	360
Figure 6 Cairo stela 34006	361
Figure 7 BMFA stela 25.632	362
Figure 8 BMFA stela 25.632	363

Figure 9	Kuban stela	364
Figure 10	Kuban stela	365
Figure 11	P.Anastasi I, lines 23,7-24,5	366
Figure 12	P.Bologna 1086, section IV	367
Figure 13	P.Bibl.Nat.199 II	368
Figure 14	P.BM 10326, recto	369
Figure 15	P.BM 10326, verso	370
Figure 16	P.BM 10326, lines 1-14	371
Figure 17	P.BM 10326, lines 15-vs.6	372
Figure 18	P.BM 10326, lines vs.7-vs.17	373
Figure 19	P.BM 10326, lines vs.18-vs.22	374
Figure 20	P.Turin 1971, recto	375
Figure 21	P.Turin 1971, verso	376
Figure 22	P.Turin 1971, lines 1-vs.1	377
Figure 23	P.Turin 1971, lines vs.2-vs.12	378
Figure 24	P.Anastasi II	379
Figure 25	P.BM 10103, recto and verso	380
Figure 26	O.BM 5631 recto	381
Figure 27	P.Berlin 10487, recto and verso	382
Figure 28	P.Berlin 10487	383
Figure 29	P.Cairo 58053, recto	384
Figure 30	P.Cairo 58053, verso	385
Figure 31	P.Cairo 58053	386
Figure 32	Map showing location of Memphis	387
Figure 33	Map of ruin fields	388
Figure 34	P.Harris 500	389
Figure 35	P.Anastasi IV	390
Figure 36	Ramesside approaches to the great temple complex of Ptah	391
Figure 37	Ear stela	392

Figure 38	Libation basin	392
Figure 39	Map of south east quadrant of great Ptah complex, showing Merenptah's palace	393
Figure 40	Map showing location of RAT	394
Figure 41	Figurines	395
Figure 42	Figurines, and representations of Hathor on plaques	396
Figure 43	Cobra statuettes	397
Figure 44	Items of personal adornment	398
Figure 45	Oriental Institute no. 13757	399
Figure 46	Oriental Institute no. 13756	400
Figure 47	P.Metr.Mus.Accession No. 24.24	401
Figure 48	O.Crum VC 67	402
Figure 49	P.Mon.Epiph.300	402
Figure 50	P.Ryl.Copt.267	403
Figure 51	P.Oxy.XLVI 3314	403
Figure 52	P.Oxy.LIX 4008	403
Figure 53	O.Vind.Copt.286	404
Figure 54	O.Medin.HabuCopt.137	404
Figure 55	P.Herm.3	405
Figure 56	O.Crum VC 39	406
Figure 57	P.Lond.VI 1917	407
Figure 58	P.Mon.Epiph.140	408
Figure 59	P.Herm.4	409
Figure 60	P.Oxy.LIX 4004	409
Figure 61	P.YaleCopt.19	410
Figure 62	P.Oxy.LIX 4003	410
Figure 63	Crum 1940, plate II	411
Figure 64	Crum 1940, 10, no. II	412
Figure 65	P.Leid.Inst.69	413
Figure 66	O.Theb.32	413

Figure 67	P.NagHamm.C4	414
Figure 68	P.NagHamm.C5	414
Figure 69	O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 54, 1	415
Figure 70	P.Oxy.XXXI 2603	415
Figure 71	O.CrumVC 45	416
Figure 72	P.Bal.188	417
Figure 73	P.Bal.256	417
Figure 74	P.Ryl.Copt.289	418
Figure 75	O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 71, 1	418
Figure 76	P.Lond.VI 1914	419
Figure 77	P.Lond.VI 1914	420
Figure 78	O.Mich.Copt.4	421
Figure 79	P.Mich.Copt.15	421
Figure 80	P.Mon.Epiph.222	421
Figure 81	Map of western Thebes showing main sites of Coptic occupation	422
Figure 82	Map of Thebes (east and west banks)	423
Figure 83	Map of monasteries of Epiphanius and Cyriacus	424
Figure 84	Designs on mud seals	425
Figure 85	Ribbed amphora (scale 1:10)	425
Figure 86	Fragments of painted pottery	425
Plate 1	Mortuary temple of Ramesses III, western Thebes (Medinet Habu)	426
Plate 2	House of Butchamon, Medinet Habu	426
Plate 3	Non-Egyptian prisoner, from palace at Medinet Habu	427
Plate 4	Non-Egyptian prisoners, from palace at Medinet Habu	427
Plate 5	Head of Ramesses II from Memphis	428
Plate 6	Colossus of Ramesses II, Memphis	428
Plate 7	Colossus of Ramesses II, Memphis	429
Plate 8	Alabaster sphinx, Memphis	429
Plate 9	Festal temple of Thutmosis III, Karnak	430

Plate 10	Stone lintels, Karnak	430
Plate 11	Stone lintels, shell niches, Luxor	431
Plate 12	Shell niche, Luxor	431
Plate 13	Silver binding of gospels, Luxor	432
Plate 14	Bronze lamp, Luxor	432
Plate 15	Avenue of sphinxes, Luxor	433
Plate 16	Church under the Abou Haggag mosque, Luxor	433
Plate 17	Church on west side of temple, Luxor	434
Plate 18	Second church on west side of temple, Luxor	434
Plate 19	Coptic graffito, Djeme (Medinet Habu)	435
Plate 20	Site of main church in Djeme	435
Plate 21	Coptic house, Djeme	436
Plate 22	Stone lintels, Djeme	436
Plate 23	View from enclosure wall of Djeme	437
Plate 24	View of the Qurn and mortuary temple of Ramesses III (Medinet Habu/Djeme)	437
Plate 25	On path to Ramesseum from Djeme	438
Plate 26	Magical symbol, great hypostyle hall of Ramesseum	438
Plate 27	Coptic graffiti, temple of Seti I	439
Plate 28	Detail of above	439
Plate 29	Valley of Queens from slopes of Qurn	440
Plate 30	Djeme from slopes of Qurn	440
Plate 31	View south, towards summit of Qurn	441
Plate 32	Pottery sherd, slopes of Qurn	441
Plate 33	View south, Qurn	442
Plate 34	View north, Qurn	442
Plate 35	Paths connecting site VII, Ramesseum and Deir Kurnet Murrai	443
Plate 36	Deir el Medina	443
Plate 37	Valley of the Queens	444
Plate 38	Deir el Roumi	444

Plate 39	Apse of church, Deir el Roumi	445
Plate 40	Room (baptistry?), Deir el Roumi	445
Plate 41	Exterior of temple of Hathor, Deir el Medina	446
Plate 42	Footprints on temple roof, Deir el Medina	446
Plate 43	Deir Kurnet Murrai, cultivation behind	447
Plate 44	Deir Kurnet Murrai, Djeme in distance	447
Plate 45	Deir Kurnet Murrai	448
Plate 46	Outlook from Deir Kurnet Murrai towards Deir el Medina and the Qurn	448
Plate 47	On path from Deir el Medina to site VII	449
Plate 48	Base of mudbrick tower, site VII	449
Plate 49	Site VII, view towards Ramesseum	450
Plate 50	Site VII, view towards Deir Kurnet Murrai	450
Plate 51	Sheikh Abd el Qurna, monastery of Cyriacus	451
Plate 52	Base of mudbrick tower, monastery of Epiphanius	451
Plate 53	View from mudbrick tower towards Deir el Bahri	452
Plate 54	Monastery of Epiphanius	452
Plate 55	Deir el Bahri	453
Plate 56	Site of Deir el Bakhit	453
Plate 57	Panoramic view over western Thebes	454
Plate 58	Pyramidal summit of the Qurn	455
Plate 59	Thoth Hill	455
Plate 60	Coptic magical papyrus	456
Plate 61	Coptic magical papyrus	456
Plate 62	Monastery of St George, Wadi Qelt, Judean desert	457
Plate 63	Mount of Temptation, Jericho	457

ABBREVIATIONS AND PRELIMINARY NOTE

Coptic period textual material is referred to using the abbreviations as laid out in J F Oates et al, 2001, *Checklist of editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic papyri, ostraca and tablets, fifth edition*. The edition of a text is only cited when reference is made to an editor's interpretation of a text, or when a text does not appear in the above checklist (for example, the two Arabic texts cited).

For the New Kingdom textual material, the edition of a text is referenced, as well as the name of a papyrus/ostrakon/stela (often in abbreviated form) as used in that edition.

Unless explicitly stated otherwise, any translations are the work of the author. These translations have been informed by the work of any previous translators.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On the seafront at Nice, above a passageway, an inscription records France's debt to the USA in World War I. It thanks the USA for its assistance in the 'conflit mondial de la civilisation contre la barbarie'. Few would now interpret World War I in such a light, and visitors to Nice pass under the inscription, barely noticing it. In contrast, when faced with similar statements on the pylons of ancient Egyptian temples, or when told of the hostility expressed by fifth century CE Egyptians towards those who did not conform to their world-view, the visitor to Egypt responds with an unquestioning fascination. So *this* was how people used to live.

The Egyptians of the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE) and the Coptic period (fourth to ninth centuries CE) were masters of self-presentation. Certain images spring to mind; that of an all-conquering Ramesses II or of a Coptic hermit, persisting in a life of denial against all the odds. General as well as more specialized studies about New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt serve to propagate the images put forward by the Egyptians themselves (see Smith 1993, 89). By such means, modern perceptions of both New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt can be dominated by views which may only have held any meaning amongst a small proportion of people actually living in Egypt during those periods. Just as the inscription at Nice masks a whole set of realities, so too do these images of New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt.

Frequently the approach to Egypt of the New Kingdom or of the Coptic period has been one in which emphasis has been placed either on the limited means of self-expression, or on endlessly variant life patterns. Life in Egypt has been presented as one of extremes, and certain questions have not been addressed.

The presentation of monolithic certainties, whether by an Egyptian of the New Kingdom or of the Coptic period, leads to the questions of why some attempt at rigid self-definition appears to be necessary for a society to survive and how far any consensus is possible. The intersections as well as the oppositions between and within different types of evidence are highlighted. The contrast provided by studying New Kingdom as well as Coptic Egypt allows a new perspective on these questions. These two periods, the first of imperialism, the second of fragmentation and rejection, forced the Egyptian to subscribe to utterly opposing world-views. The New Kingdom Egyptian looked to the Egyptian past, whereas the Egyptian of the Coptic period looked to the non-Egyptian past.

A historiographical and theoretical setting

The subject of this thesis appears to be rooted in a very contemporary obsession: that of identity. Yet I would also argue that such a pre-occupation was relevant to nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars of New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt, and was furthermore not without significance for those actually living during the periods under investigation.

The theoretical frameworks of modern scholarship may have changed since the nineteenth century, but this has not always resulted in widely differing conclusions. Frequently it is the language used to express any conclusions which has changed rather than the conclusions themselves. This is especially the case when studying the more distant past, where uncertainties and multiple interpretations are always going to be part of an interpretation of available evidence, whatever the theoretical outlook. Even the debate between the presentation of facts or the development of theory is not new. In an introduction to ancient history (including ancient Egypt) published in 1871, Mahaffy criticised the tendency of French historians who 'make history a mere arena for

supporting a pre-conceived political theory' (1871, 6) and he also regarded empirical study as more important than theoretical work:

'I often apprehend that the present tendency of Oxford culture is to encourage the writing of these sketchy theoretical essays, brilliant in style and conception, but impatient of real labour' (1871, 20).

The suspicion that the development of theory was not as rigorous or as necessary as the accumulation of new information has lingered. The priority, especially with a civilization as unknown as that of ancient Egypt, has been to collect evidence. Thus Janssen's (1975) work on the economic life of one community in New Kingdom Egypt made no reference to economic theory; 'facts' had to come first, the theory would follow (Janssen 1975,1). With reference to the use of postmodern theory within history, it has been stated that it can serve to obscure rather than reveal the past (Evans 2000). In this critique of postmodernism, in which Evans fully accepted the ways in which postmodernism has been of benefit to historical study, he also concluded:

'I will look humbly at the past and say despite them all [the postmodern historians]: it really happened, and we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out how it happened and reach some tenable though always less than final conclusions about what it all meant' (Evans 2000, 253).

In archaeological and, increasingly, in Egyptological research as well, it is hard to access works which do not include a section on recent theory (especially postmodern) drawn from other disciplines (for example anthropology and philosophy) as writers seek to demonstrate their theoretical awareness. It seems to be a necessary stage before the actual body of the text can be reached. Both archaeologists and Egyptologists have sought to emphasise that their work is not naive, that it is responding to, and useful to, other fields of study. Yet Egyptology has always developed alongside, and been a part of, history, archaeology, papyrology, linguistics and textual criticism (see Adams, W, 1997, 27-8), with a time-span ranging from before the earliest hieroglyphs to Coptic. Nevertheless, a desire to locate any archaeological/Egyptological research more visibly in the wider arena of anthropology, history or social theory, areas which have long

undergone much self-reflective examination, has meant that these processes of theoretical examination are given an air of urgency.

With respect to Egypt's pharaonic past, this is particularly represented by Meskell's works, and a desire to focus on less/non-hierarchical evidence, to emphasise the non-textual as opposed to textual evidence (see for example, 1994). Theoretical insights have also been used on more overtly hierarchical evidence from ancient Egypt and have been regarded as crucial: 'the use of a theoretical framework avoids the pitfalls of arguing from guesses about motivations and other such imponderables' (Baines 1996b, 360). From this basis, Baines was then able to examine attitudes towards ethnic groups (in particular Libyans) as seen in literature and iconography (1996b, 363-84). Of central relevance to this thesis, was the reminder that in Egypt 'official ideology was aggressively uniformitarian and evidence for cultural diversity is sparse' (1996b, 362). Research on the Coptic period has been incorporated into wider volumes addressing very contemporary themes (Montserrat 1998), giving a new reading of textual evidence.

Despite this theoretical awareness, theory can also make little visible impact on the actual text apart from frequent asides to cross-cultural material and parallels (see for example Alston 2002). This is not to say that theoretical awareness is not useful. Even E.P. Thompson's polemic against theory (1978), especially that generated by Althusser, is put into context by his theoretical, Marxist position in approaching the history of the ruled, rather than the history of the rulers (Burke 2001, 1).

One of the major effects of this theoretical self-examination within archaeology has been in the emphasis placed upon issues of identity, ethnicity, nationalism, indigenous peoples and the influence of archaeology on the contemporary political arena (see Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Jones 1997, 1-13). Such emphases incidentally stress the relevance of archaeology outside its immediate confines as it is used to empower the disenfranchised (Baker 1990, 54-5). These increasingly anti-nationalist, anti-

progressivist (in terms of the analysis of cultural change) and multi-cultural angles serve to distance archaeology from the nation-building associations of its past (Gosden 2001). Incidentally, the postmodern theory which can find a home in these archaeological texts is also condemned by some from the far left as preventing the discovery of any hard information thus denying the existence of progress and thereby furthering the capitalist programme (see Peacock 2002, 10, 226-30).

The topic of this thesis could have been approached from many different angles from the nineteenth century onwards. For example, it could have been used to demonstrate the links between New Kingdom and Coptic period Egyptians, to highlight the 'difference' or the 'superiority' of the ancient Egyptians to other ancient peoples and to link them in with the western world. Thus it seems vital to examine both the priorities of earlier research and the theoretical background. This is to evaluate, rather than to dictate, the evidence itself. As argued by Burke (2001, 164), the variety in the past demonstrates that 'theory can never be "applied to the past"', but that instead theory can 'suggest new questions for historians to ask about "their" period, or new answers to familiar questions' (2001, 165).

Bringing the past to life

With a civilization as distant and, until the nineteenth century, as lost as ancient Egypt, there has been a continual demand for information on the social, not only the political, aspects to the life of an ancient Egyptian, covering much of what could now be termed 'identity politics'. Egyptologists had to satisfy the public's demand to know more about how an ancient Egyptian lived, who an ancient Egyptian was, and what her/his pre-occupations and religious beliefs were.

As Greece and Rome had been subsumed into the intellectual heritage of the West, so too did Egyptologists hope that Egypt would become 'an automatic part of everyman's

inheritance' (Glanville 1942, xvii). The search was for the individual in Egypt, for the experience of the 'ordinary' person living under pharaonic rule, to counter the despotic images generated in the Old Testament: 'much nonsense has been written about the oppression of the people, their tears and groans. With the splendid organisation evident in the work, the people must have been well managed, and there was no hardship whatever in carrying out the work' (Petrie 1923, 26). At the same time, it was realised that the individual was bound to be more elusive than in more recent civilizations: 'the individual may not have expanded here as he did in Greece, but Egypt was none the less, like Greece, an exceptional success' (Berr 1927, xxvii). An undue emphasis was also continually placed upon the exceptional, almost enlightened nature of the ancient Egyptian civilization, to give the readers something to admire:

'nor can we fail to remark the difference between them and their Asiatic rivals, the Assyrians, who even at a much later period, had the great defects of Asiatic cruelty - flaying alive, impaling, and torturing their prisoners; as the Persians, Turks and other Orientals have done to the present century; the reproach of which cannot be extended to the ancient Egyptians' (Wilkinson 1854, 3 - compare Baines 1999d, 12).

In books charting the 'everyday' lives of the ancient Egyptians, writers referred to more familiar images, to bring the past closer and to render the Egyptian civilization as something more familiar. Parallels were continually drawn, to make ancient Egypt less strange, while at the same time differences were emphasised (Wilkinson 1857, ix). For example, the numerous titles of the king of Egypt were compared to the large number held by the Prince of Wales (Petrie 1923, 9), and the setting of ancient Egypt was contrasted to England: 'all this sounds very different from our own life. Instead of the village High Street, or the main railway line, or Piccadilly or the Strand, the essential landmark for the Egyptian was (and is today) the Nile' (Glanville 1933, 17). Such was the interest in the lifestyle of the ancient Egyptians that their eating habits, their homes, and their domestic lives were narrated (Glanville 1933).

In stimulating and satisfying any interest in the Coptic period in Egypt, the scholar's task was, in a way, easier, as one aspect of life during that period could be understood

with easy reference to the present. The prevalent religious belief in Egypt at that time, Christianity, made parallels simpler, yet the material culture of that period did not have nearly the same dazzling impact as that of the pharaonic era (see Butler 1884, vii). This also meant that it was the Christian beliefs which were the prime, if not the only, focus of interest (Butcher 1897; Murray 1963, 141). Where interest was shown in the life-patterns of Egyptians of the Coptic period, it was frequently only the evidence from monastic contexts which was available or utilised. Thus it was possible to build up an intimate and detailed picture of the lives of a group of Egyptians living in a monastery in the west bank at Thebes (Winlock and Crum 1926). Their eating habits, domestic and sacred space as well as their business dealings were all charted through a careful excavation. The lives of Christians in modern Egypt also provided what was thought to be a living witness to the Coptic period, as well as to the pharaonic period (see Lane 1842, 489; Sayce 1911, viii). The Coptic liturgy as still said in Coptic churches in Egypt preserved for modern observers a part of ancient religious ritual supposedly linked to the Egyptians of the Coptic and pharaonic period (Storrs 1943, 53).

Bringing the ancient Egyptians to life was a complex process, and research was often concentrated on recovering the lives of the elite, primarily through the excavation of burial sites and through the priority given to textual finds (see Kemp 1984). Yet there were those who were interested in the less glamorous finds and sites as well (see Petrie 1891). In common with such interests, emphasis was placed upon recording the context of finds (Petrie 1891, 161), and upon the careful use of different types of sources, textual and non-textual (McLean 1913, vi-vii). Nor was the use of cross-cultural parallels entirely haphazard, but was also guided by academic principles.

A comprehensive, anthropologically grounded examination of the rural population of Upper Egypt during the 1920s, proved to be of use to Egyptologists seeking to explain material finds (Blackman 2000 [1927]). Indeed, Blackman's work is still of use today (Ikram in Blackman 2000 [1927], ix-x). At about the same time, a *Festschrift* was

written for Francis Griffith, a major figure in Egyptology, and the sections of this book reveal the wide priorities of Egyptological research and the integration of anthropological parallels (Glanville 1932b). They also demonstrate a desire to study Egypt from its origins until the Islamic period.

The eight sections of the book cover history; texts and philology (hieroglyphic and hieratic); texts and philology (demotic, Coptic, Arabic and Old-Nubian); texts and philology (Greek); art, archaeology and science (this section is only a little shorter than the three text and philology sections combined); religion; anthropology and the history of Egyptology (Glanville 1932b, vii-viii). This epitomises the broad and far-reaching (and in no way isolationist) aims of Egyptology at this period, in which skills from many disciplines were integrated in order to achieve an understanding of Egypt's past. The contributions, by a wide range of authors, include a comparative study of burial customs in central Africa, the Sudan and Egypt in which the reader was warned that no generalisations could be made (Seligman 1932, 462). The volume concludes with a series of almost random impressions gained by an Egyptologist whilst working in Egypt. His diverse interests included the study of forgeries for their own sake, and his account was free from any patronising statements of superiority (Quibell 1932).

The above attempts at bringing the past to life in Egypt, through the careful use of a variety of sources alongside a willingness to use modes of comparison or parallels from modern as well as ancient societies, still have resonance today. Since the 1930s many books and articles have been produced which aim to chart the lives of the ancient Egyptians in their own terms. The vast majority of these have been broadly theory-free (see for example Cerny 1973; Kemp 1993), and the main differences between such works and earlier works has been in the use of new material, the choice of language, of expression, and in the prioritisation of different types of evidence. Kemp's work in particular (1993) aimed to show that the ancient Egyptians were not just the manipulated tools/victims of their rulers. This immediately makes his work more accessible, and the

ancient Egyptians more understandable and real thus achieving the aims expressed by earlier scholars such as Glanville. The idea of individual action is nevertheless a contentious one (see Meskell 1998, 152-3 on the social construction of the term 'individual'), and sometimes thought to be anachronistic for ancient Egypt, in which any 'public' assessment by an individual of his/her life was only open to a minority (see Baines 1999c, 25).

There has also gradually been the desire to make Egyptology a more theory-laden world, as academia as a whole has become more and more preoccupied with theory. The late 1970s were a crucial time for a re-evaluation of Egyptological priorities, and in particular the relationship of Egyptology to the social sciences. Thus a group of Egyptologists contributed to a book entitled *Egyptology and the Social Sciences* (Weeks 1979). In this book, rather than arguing for the imposition of theory onto Egyptology, a change of focus for Egyptological research was looked for. Thus settlement sites, rather than monumental sites, were argued to be the priority of excavations in Egypt (Bietak 1979, 98-9), and the importance of context was re-emphasised (Redford 1979, 4-5).

In 1976 an entire issue of the *Royal Anthropological Institute News* was dedicated to promoting cross-disciplinary fertilisation between Egyptology and anthropology. The major difference between Egyptology and anthropology was highlighted in the introduction to this issue (Baines 1976, 3): 'its [Egyptology's] aims are, however, unlike those of a social science, in that its starting-point is a set of facts, the remains from a particular area and period, and not a body of theory'. In 1997 it was felt necessary to produce a further publication on Egyptology and anthropology (Lustig 1997). This was comprised of a series of anthropologically oriented articles (including the use of theoretical models). In one of these, terminology such as self and other was applied to New Kingdom imperialism, specifically relating to New Kingdom depictions of Nubians (Smith 1997, 81-5).

The concern to locate Egyptology in an anthropological setting, as epitomised by the above works, has frequently resulted in changing the emphasis of Egyptological research and the types of evidence looked for (basing it more in less elite, archaeological evidence). Any bias towards textual and monumental evidence was now tilted towards non-textual, non-monumental evidence. This is a natural development given the new techniques of conducting archaeological research in Egypt, and as a reaction to the view of Egyptologists as treasure hunters. As noted above, however, an interest in the domestic, private space of the ancient Egyptians had always run alongside the desire to reveal luxury products, even if the focus had been on dramatising the wealth and achievements of the elite. Furthermore, the utility of ancient Egypt to sociological work had long been noted, and ancient Egypt was included as a comparative study in a series compiled by the sociologist Spencer (1925).

This was entitled *Descriptive sociology; or groups of sociological facts*. The aims of the series, as described by Petrie, the editor of the volume on Egypt, was to list the characteristic facts of each different society under uniform headings, allowing easy comparison (Petrie in Spencer 1925). A further aim of the text was to allow an objective reading of facts: the reader would be ‘uninfluenced by the hypotheses or prejudices of other persons’ (Petrie in Spencer 1925). Despite what now appear as the very dated aims of the book, Spencer’s categories of information hold fascination for the contemporary (and postmodern) reader, whereby ‘bodily mutilations’, ‘clothing’ and ‘magic’ are listed alongside other categories such as ‘division of labour’ and ‘general government’.

A comparative work on ancient Egypt set in the context of six other civilizations (Trigger 1995) stands in the tradition of Spencer. Here, Trigger aimed to get closer to the past lives through eliminating his own prejudices, applying the same terminology as used in the civilizations under study (1995, 18). Such careful and systematic

investigation of cross-cultural categories thus aimed to avoid the inappropriate application of parallels between societies. Cross-cultural parallels formed the core of the argument, instead of merely forming occasional references. One of the clearest conclusions which was to emerge from Trigger's work was the centrality of hierarchy to early civilizations, and a lack of resistance to this form of social order: that 'this attitude developed independently in all the early civilizations suggests that it must have begun as a manifestation of practical rather than of cultural reason, which by definition is idiosyncratic to specific cultural traditions' (1995, 111).

The increased desire to locate Egyptology closely alongside other disciplines, most notably anthropology, has been reflected by an increased interest in studying the less visible in ancient Egypt. As the complex debates concerning feminist theory have developed and continued, certain studies have appeared on women in ancient Egypt in which emphasis has been placed on making the lives of ancient Egyptian women less elusive (see for example Robins 1993; Fletcher 2001). Similarly, textual sources have been removed from their pinnacle, and have been increasingly mistrusted as reliable sources (yet it is also a travesty to assume that textual evidence was always read in a straightforward, accepting manner). Instead literary theory has been used to vocalise the different techniques utilised in ancient texts (Loprieno 1988; 1996).

Investigation into the Coptic period in Egypt is often a sideline occupation, not fitting easily into any category of study, but overlapping with many, and forming a much smaller focus of research than that for pharaonic Egypt. Yet this has also been affected by theoretical perspectives. The demand for settlement archaeology continues as opposed to solely recording monumental structures, although Coptic archaeology continues to be a much smaller source of study than textual analysis, as is shown by the focus of the *International Congress of Coptic Studies* (Orlandi 1993). More recently, Bagnall (2001, 243) has emphasised the need for more excavations. Modern terminology (such as nationalism) has long been applied to the study of textual sources

(Leipoldt 1903; Frend 1982). An unusual example of the application of contemporary theoretical preoccupations to Coptic texts has been Wilfong's (1998a, 131-3) analysis of the physical modification of the body as described in Coptic martyrdoms.

Very much in the tradition of those such as Glanville and Petrie, Meskell has attempted to bring Egypt's past to life in a new way. Theoretical perspectives infuse her work. Despite sometimes long introductory comments dealing with, for example, third wave feminism, a frequently traditional set of source material (such as mortuary data), textual and non-textual, is then utilised, albeit from different angles (see Meskell 1999, 8-95). The aim of her work was stated explicitly in a postscript to her latest book:

'This project has drawn on a variety of scholarly traditions: the *Annales* historians, third wave feminism, the postprocessual school of archaeology, and a host of disciplines such as anthropology, social theory, and literary studies. Crucial insights from those fields allow us to view Egypt from a postcolonial perspective, to deconstruct the layered preoccupations of older scholarship, and to expose our own preconceptions, thereby reenvisioning Egypt for a new millennium' (Meskell 2002, 208).

Yet, if stripped of the terminology, Meskell's insights would be along the same lines as those of Glanville. She has also aimed to bring the individual to life in ancient Egypt (as has Kemp), and has presented the evidence in a similarly lively, accessible narrative. Her book on private life in Egypt (Meskell 2002), based upon the evidence from Deir el Medina, a New Kingdom settlement for those who worked for the king on the royal necropolis at Thebes, has many of the same intentions as Glanville or Petrie's works, despite the theoretical aims expressed above. Thus when she stated (2002, 148), 'we can go some way toward reconstructing the sensual life of the Egyptians: the material pleasures, intoxications, tastes, aromas, music and dances that they embraced and that enhanced their bodily being', her aims were not far from earlier Egyptologists such as Peet (1931, 7) who wrote that the ancient Egyptians 'were a bright, merry people with very little taint of cruelty in their nature, who loved wine and music and feasting'. Through all these authors the ancient Egyptians are brought closer. Even the aim of viewing the ancient Egyptians in their own terms, that of their lifecycle (Meskell 2001, 200; 2002, 57), would not have been alien to previous scholars, nor indeed to

anyone given the universally applicable relevance of individuals' lifecycles (although compare Gilchrist 2000, 325-6 on the innovation of this approach for archaeological research).

Uniting the history of research into the past of Egypt has been the concern to bring it to life, to fill it with individuals who have been explained in contrast to today as well as in parallel to other civilizations from the past and present. This has been framed in an increasingly sophisticated theoretical framework, which has changed priorities and made the subject more acceptable in a contemporary context. Meskell's Egypt is populated by sensuous individuals, free from the moralising influence of the Judeo-Christian world, just as Petrie's Egypt was populated by well-ordered content workers. And the practices of the ascetes, living in the Egyptian desert following Christian lives fit themselves well to contemporary interests (see Goehring 1997), just as they can also be a source of religious inspiration (see Yanney 1992, 98). These changes of emphases do not actually change what happened (see Thompson 1978, 232-3).

The reminder that a convincing, evocative past can be captured without the overt statement of theoretical perspectives is provided by a study of twelve individuals from 2650 BCE to 150 BCE in Egypt (Ray 2001). In this, parallels and comparisons were inserted effortlessly into a narrative which achieves its aim of bringing Egypt 'home' (Ray 2001, 1). This is doubtless an aim which could justifiably be argued about at length by theoreticians.

Controversial identities

A continual theme throughout the history of study into Egypt has been a desire to find out the actual physical identity of the ancient Egyptians. This is a much contested topic, and one which has, in the main, been increasingly abandoned as anthropological research has changed its priorities (although this has been shown to be a superficial

change of emphasis: see Keita and Kittles 1997, 534, 541). It is an area in which theory has played an undeniable role, in conjunction with changing political situations from colonialism to postcolonialism. Only a few would now interpret this thesis topic as motivated by a desire to find out what colour the Egyptians thought they were, or that it was positing a unique racial link between Egypt of the New Kingdom and the Coptic period. That it would still be possible, however, demands first an insight into how the obsession in the race of the Egyptians has been played out. How is it that Meskell (2001) can now theorise about identity without discussing race (despite mentioning ancient Egypt)?

Part of the essential 'fact' gathering which was carried out in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved the copying of reliefs from monuments across Egypt. This is still carried out, for example by the University of Chicago at the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, Thebes. Yet, in the early stages of such work a major source of fascination and interest was the numerous depictions on monuments of what appeared to be non-Egyptians, often labelled by country of origin, always in submission. In his contribution to Griffith's *Festschrift* (Glanville 1932b - see above), Petrie noted that he had been commissioned to record such images, alongside images of Egyptians (Petrie 1932, 477). He did not state who had commissioned this work, the purpose of his article instead being to describe his trip made in 1886 with Griffith.

It was on this trip that Petrie gathered the information (Petrie 1932, 477-9) which was later privately printed as *Racial photographs from Egyptian monuments* (1899). These images were obtained through first making paper squeezes, followed by casts and then photographing these casts (Petrie 1932, 479; Drower 1995, 118-9). In sixteen pamphlets numerous photographs catalogued both Egyptian and non-Egyptian heads cut from their context, with each photograph labelled in terms of the supposed identity of the person depicted. These labels distinguished between types of Egyptians as well as between Egyptian and non-Egyptian, for example the category of 'high Egyptian'

was used. This aimed to be a scientific, objective study of use to Egyptologists, anthropologists and the many who were interested in race at this period. Yet this series of pamphlets seems like a relic of a happily past era, from which little can now be gained, other than a deconstructive analysis.

At the time, scholars were very conscious of their interest in race, past and present, and debated continually about who (racially) the ancient Egyptians were. The state of research at the beginning of the twentieth century was summarised by one interested party (Smith 1923, 37). Smith used the term 'Brown Race' to express his theory that the proto-Egyptians were part of a widespread group of people who spread across north-east Africa and much of western Europe (Smith 1923, 67-9). His work fitted into the general scholarly discussions of the day, whereby each development in Egypt was attributed to a different wave of invasions, or population movements. The related issue of the role of Egypt in the formation of western culture is still debated. Glanville concluded his general introduction to the ancient Egyptians by suggesting that the alphabet arose from the influence of the Egyptians on the 'semitic peoples' (1933, 95) - the implication being that we should be interested in the ancient Egyptians because without them 'our' civilization could not have arisen. The general tone of this debate has been criticised: 'why is the Near East considered to be only a precursor or foil of Greek and European culture, not to the Islamic Middle East?' (Mieroop 1997, 296).

Yet even this question still views ancient cultures in terms of the *contribution* made to later societies, like some kind of pecking order, instead of being interested in an ancient culture for its own sake. Thus the ongoing Afrocentrist debate similarly views the race of the ancient Egyptians of central importance alongside their contribution to African civilization. The lifework of Diop was spent in exposing what he saw as the racist exclusion of black Africans from the ancient Egyptian world by scholars (see for example 1962; 1967; Dathorne 1989, 127; Clarke 1989, 115-7). He sought to counteract what he perceived as racist initiatives to divorce Egyptian achievements from

Africa by joining in the race debate. Yet his work, in counteracting a racist bias of the past, also involved a type of racism: Egypt was now to be proved as an exclusively black civilization. Much time was spent by Diop (1967, 285-8) formulating a way of testing mummified skin for melanin content which he felt would categorically settle the issue. In the same publication Diop, rather in the style of Petrie, included a large number of examples of ancient Egyptian representations of themselves and others to support his case. In a sense, therefore, it may be justifiably claimed that Diop's work has just continued an old academic debate with a new emphasis: 'like the science, history, and literature he critiques, Diop too ends up inventing a new Africa with Negroid Pharaohs in Negroid Egypt' (Masolo 1994, 14).

Diop's main audience was amongst similarly minded Afrocentric scholars. Yet he studied at the Sorbonne, and eventually did have a PhD thesis passed ('avec la mention honorable') in 1960 (Fall 2000, 25), having had a previous one rejected. To have achieved this acceptance by a renowned French university was regarded as a great success by his Afrocentrist supporters (see Fall 2000). His earlier, failed thesis had been published by *Présence Africaine*. This publishing house is also located in Paris, where it remains dedicated to the Afrocentrist cause, and it continued to publish Diop throughout his life (Jules-Rosette 1998, 2, 4-8, 14, 244).

Interaction between Diop and mainstream Egyptologists was limited. In 1974, the UNESCO forum on the population of ancient Egypt provided a venue for those such as Vercoutter (1978) to discuss and refute Diop's claims. The issue of the race of the ancient Egyptians was still considered an important focus for study. Vercoutter preferred to see Egypt as a 'melting pot', and he argued that more physical anthropological studies were necessary to determine the race of the ancient Egyptians (1978, 23-5). Yet those who were opposed to the Afrocentrist cause were felt not to have prepared for the conference as well as the Afrocentrists. This was felt, by some, to reflect the general apathy in the academic community on the issue (Moitt 1989, 350-

1). The study of Egypt could still be viewed as distinct from the study of African history (Noguera 1976, 2).

Bernal entered into this debate with the publication of the two volumes of *Black Athena* (1987; 1991). These received a great deal of coverage, and responses, within and outside academia. The pre-dominant message was a powerful one: that attitudes towards Egypt were inextricably linked with the racist agendas of western Europe which effectively served to obscure Egypt's contribution to Greek civilization. There is clearly much to learn from such statements (Said 1994, 15-6), yet they were based on the at times deeply flawed use of evidence. The argument was aimed, in the main, at classical studies and both classicists and Egyptologists responded, for example in a book of collected articles (Baines 1996a; O'Connor 1996; Yurco 1996). Amongst the criticisms of Bernal's work was the point that much of his argument had been put forward previously (see Perkus 1995, 75). It was also felt that more evidence was required before it could be convincingly argued that classical study had been primarily motivated by racist ideology (Coleman 1992, 77).

Bernal's work highlighted a very real issue, although at the same time it depended on arguments of race, using the same criteria as had always been used (for example linguistic links) to demonstrate that the 'West' was primarily dependent upon Egypt's influence on Greece. It also marked out classical studies as being exceptional in having a race-obsessed (and racist) past when such a past is common to the majority of academic disciplines, none of which (including classical studies) have been utterly unreflective or unaware of the issues (see Finley 1975, 76-81). Furthermore, this misguided interest in promoting one culture over another has been criticised. Thus Baines argued (1996b, 383) that *Black Athena* merely 'perpetuates a dependent position in which the ancient Near East has been placed in relation to the "West"', and has suggested that Said's interest in Bernal's work is surprising, given Said's arguments against the prioritisation of one culture over another. Yet Bernal has defensively stated

'I wholeheartedly agree that all world cultures should be studied and appreciated for what they are' (Bernal 1992, 86).

The fundamental flaw in this type of argument remains: the pivotal role of the supposed racial identity of the ancient Egyptians (see Young 1994, 157). Whilst this does allow some very public restitution for the bias of some western scholarship (Bernal 1991, 244), it also places too much importance on racial difference. Thus the situation has arisen whereby racial interpretations 'have been imposed on the material remains of a culture even though these remains do not in themselves denote race' (Bard 1996, 106). And the argument, stimulated as a result of contemporary political and social inequalities, inevitably is far removed from Egypt's past, where race may have been of no concern to the ancient Egyptians (Roth 1995a; Snowden 1996, 127). Importantly, however, this is a point Bernal has acknowledged (2001, 28) and he has explicitly stated that he does not see a 'biological utility' to the term race. At the same time, he has exposed the political inadequacy at the heart of the academic debate:

'In the United States and Western Europe, "one drop of black blood" is enough to label someone a "black". However, when Ancient Egypt is viewed, no one is considered "black" unless he or she conforms to the European stereotype of a West African. Very few Ancient Egyptians would have been labelled "white" in nineteenth- or twentieth-century Britain or America' (Bernal 2001, 29).

Bernal has, therefore, become crucial to Afrocentrists, for whom he is seen as a welcome ally, in their at times dogmatic arguments. An intensely polarised approach to the racial identity of Egypt's past has arisen. Articles continue to be produced in which the only aim is to prove the race of the ancient Egyptians (see Crawford 1995), and the 'contribution' of Egypt to Christianity has been claimed by Afrocentrists (Finch 1986). Thus introductory books on African history routinely include statements about the race of the ancient Egyptians. For example, one such book commented on the ethnocentrism of western scholars and then claimed the ancient Egyptians as 'ancestors' (Boyd 1991, 41). This emphasis on the African heritage of Egypt, and therefore the west, has been thought suitable to integrate into the school curriculum in the USA (Crawford 1996, 8). The intention was to empower minorities in USA society, and to

make the majority culture aware of the achievements of Africa (Crawford 1996, 5, 25, 170). The positive effects of such politicisation have been acknowledged (Roth 1995b, 15).

That these arguments are not totally misplaced is illustrated by a programme made (in 1997) about pharaonic Egypt as part of a French radio series, *La Marche du siècle*. This programme failed to place Egypt in Africa, nor did it mention Diop, causing a feeling of alienation amongst Afrocentrists in France (Diop and Diop 1997; *Le Comité* 1997). Thus it has been felt important for Egyptology to acknowledge the insights which Afrocentrism may bring to the study of ancient Egypt (Roth 1995a, 14). Afrocentrist works may now be found in specialist Egyptological libraries, indicating a willingness to engage with this debate, despite its dogmatism. Furthermore, the necessity of putting Egypt unequivocally in Africa, and of acknowledging the racist approaches to the history of the continent is widely accepted.

Despite the desire of Afrocentrists to focus the debate on Egypt's past purely into an issue of race and achievement, the priorities of research often lie elsewhere. One category which nevertheless persists as a focus for research, and which can be closely related to the Afrocentric perspective, is that of ethnicity. This can become almost a replacement term for race (see Keita and Kittles 1997, 541). As argued by Malik (1996, 175) a definition of ethnicity which depends upon assertions of shared cultural and belief systems 'allows us to divide humanity into discrete groups without feeling the taint of racial ideology', and 'in actual use, the concept of ethnicity is not so different from that of race'.

The argument concerning ethnicity inevitably (however much the fluidity of ethnicity is emphasised) brings to mind notions of race, which brings the argument back to the Afrocentrists. The 'ritual' of academic study, in which the existence of something is denied but then studied anyway was condemned by Gilroy (1998) in an article claiming

that race should no longer be used as a method of analysis. He stated (Gilroy 1998, 842) that 'the pious ritual in which we always agree that "race" is invented but are then required to defer to its embeddedness in the world and to accept the demand for justice nevertheless requires us to enter the political arenas that it helps to mark out'. Despite the acknowledged difference between race and ethnicity, Gilroy's comment about the use of race could equally be applied to ethnicity.

Nevertheless, its relevance as a tool for research within the archaeological discipline has been argued for (see Jones 1997, 61), and it is used in the context of ancient Egypt (see Leahy 1995; Baines 1996b, 362-3, 371). And this is no doubt in part to get away from the stereotype of Egypt as a homogenous nation (see Smith 1993, 89 who repeated this stereotype). Much emphasis has been placed on ethnic difference in the Egyptian past, which also serves to make it a society more easily understandable in modern terms (see Ray 1998, 10-1).

Whether ethnicity really is a useful category to impose upon the past is questioned by the very lack of clarity which exists in contemporary discussions about the meaning of ethnicity. Clear definitions have been attempted. For example, ethnicity is a 'self-conscious identification with a particular social group at least partly based on a specific locality or origin' (Shennan 1994, 14), but even this sounds almost too inclusive to be instructive. This particular point was raised by Rattansi (1994, 53) who felt that the broad definitions of ethnicity were self-defeating. This is epitomised by Kamp and Yoffee's (1990, 88) statement that 'ethnic identity rests on the conscious awareness of group members'.

Yet this vagueness concerning ethnicity is based upon much painstaking anthropological and sociological research (Thompson 1989, 3). Two models were suggested in order to better understand ethnicity: the primordial and the instrumental. The former holds that ethnicity is fixed and given at birth (linking it very much with

race), and the latter argues for the social construction of ethnicity, giving it a greater fluidity (for a presentation of these models see Cohen 1995, 120; Banks 1996, 12-3, 185; Pieterse 1996, 27; Jones 1997, 65-79; Hall 1997, 226; Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 48-59).

The major proponent of the instrumental model of ethnicity was Barth (1969). Through anthropological research, he demonstrated that it was possible for people to move between ethnic groups and to cross boundaries (Barth 1969, 22-5), and also argued that no simple link exists between ethnic units and culture (1969, 14). The very fluidity of his understanding of ethnicity (see 1969, 29), seems to lessen its value as a term of analysis. This issue has been addressed by incorporating both the primordial and instrumental definitions of ethnicity (Jones 1997, 83; Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 71).

Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus has been incorporated into the understanding of ethnicity, giving it more meaning, especially in an archaeological context (Jones 1997, 88-90, 96-7, 128). Indeed, Bourdieu's (1977, 81) approach that there is an 'immanent law...laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing' does explain similarities within groupings for modes of action. The difficulty of 'escaping' from the habitus is, however, both depressing and problematic, and questions the possibility of independent action. Is ethnicity (whatever that is) really as dictatorial as the habitus? These problems have been highlighted through research carried out amongst the Kabyle in the 1970s where fundamental changes in the status of women had occurred, despite Bourdieu's belief in the basically unchanging nature of Kabyle society (see Lane 1999, 108).

Awareness of the contextual variability of ethnicity (Mullings 1994, 25) has allowed some flexibility to be inserted into the analysis of ethnicity in the past. In a study of ethnicity in Ptolemaic Egypt, Goudriaan (1988, preface) was able to decide that 'the question of who the Egyptians and the Greeks were reduces itself to the problem of

which people counted as such and in which circumstances'. And it is the contextual investigation of how people identified themselves which is most relevant.

It is still hard, and perhaps impossible, to break free from the mind-set which looks for separate groups in evidence from the past, labelling them as ethnicities. As is seen in Chapter 3, dealing with the site of Memphis, the contemporary obsession with ethnicity can be all too easily imposed onto New Kingdom Egypt. The assertion of difference was clearly crucial in both New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt, but whether that can be transferred into a meaningful statement concerning the existence of ethnic groups is doubtful. Thus in this thesis the aim is not to argue for a particular ethnicity or racial origin from the evidence, but rather to examine the wider context of self-definition. The labels in the evidence itself are used, which, as is seen, were frequently fluid and utterly subjective. Relevant to this thesis, as a point of comparison, is the issue of Greek identity, something which had no national point of reference, yet held meaning for the Greek and non-Greek: 'a Roman, of course, would often have referred to a Greek as a Greek, not as an Athenian or Ephesian (as they would call a man a Gaul or a German), just as the Greeks had always identified non-Greeks by "national" labels' (Finley 1975, 133). Thus, I use the contrast Egyptian/non-Egyptian as a generalization which hides a wealth of other levels of meaning (compare Finley 1975, 62).

Self-definition

Accessing an individual, whether in the past or present, and assessing what was/is important to that person is clearly going to be elusive, given the huge self-consciousness which now surrounds all issues to do with identity (Rowlands 1994, 131). It forms a source of inspiration in contemporary literature, in films as well as in music, and in this discourse Egypt's past can play a part.

Thus a rap artist from Marseilles, the son of Italian immigrants, has called himself Akhenaton, taking inspiration from a king of Egypt whom he has interpreted as a humanitarian and egalitarian ruler (see *Radikal* 2001). For Copts living in the USA, the pharaonic past, and early Christian past, is a source of difference, of contemporary identity (see Ayad 1989). Links between distant pasts and the present have further been reinforced by an investigation into attitudes towards foreigners from the ancient world to the present, including evidence from pharaonic Egypt alongside twentieth century USA (see Leblanc 1999). And in a publication entitled *Valeur et distance, identités et sociétés en Egypte* (Décobert 2000) issues of identity from Ptolemaic to modern Egypt have been examined by a range of different authors.

Egypt's past, pharaonic and Christian, can therefore, be effortlessly incorporated into the present, and within the whole realm of identity politics numerous categories (many of which are flexible) have been cited as ways of investigating how individuals might have defined themselves in the past. This incorporation of the past into the present has been seen as the necessary end result, after having first distinguished the past from the present (Thomas 1990, 20), yet the imposition of contemporary categories onto the past is clearly full of pitfalls (see Whitehouse 1998, 3).

Politically, these pitfalls may be most obvious with the analytic tools of race and ethnicity but it may also seem, given the huge weight of modern pre-conceptions, that any attempt at accessing how the Egyptians of the New Kingdom and Coptic period defined themselves will only ever be an illusion. This is further exacerbated by what modern historians would consider a meagre quantity of primary source material. This makes it all the more important to consider ways in which ideas about identity have been negotiated and reformulated in contemporary scholarship and life experiences. Such ideas can open new perspectives.

The self-definition of an individual may be contingent on a wealth of sometimes conflicting factors (Wallerstein 1993, 80; Said 1994, 336; Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 85). For example, the past, politics or social class could be the most central aspects to an individual (Stein 1989, 78), yet for others gender (Okely 1996) or language (Anderson 1994, 145) could be more important. The dual aspect to identity, in which an individual may present a different image than his/her actual self-image makes accessing self-definition more complex (Wallman 1983, 72), especially given the potential for someone's self-definition to change in response to external situations (Rowlands 1994, 132). At the same time, there should not be too much emphasis upon the endless reformulation of self-definition (Bondi 1996, 85).

Nevertheless, identity is clearly something which can be imposed, learnt or relearnt in accordance with changing needs and priorities. A particularly clear illustration is provided by the writer Aburish's (1998) account of his family, from 1917 to the present day. They lived in Bethany, a small village just outside Jerusalem. He described how the British tried to assert authority over the village through the local government (1998, 154-6). This was unwelcome as there was no concept of identification outside kinship and village; the idea of a state was utterly alien (1998, 154-5). Members of the family were gradually made to become aware of loyalties and identities beyond that of their village and tribe. This process was assisted by 'professionals' who were sent into villages like Bethany to teach the inhabitants about nationalism, as well as by newspapers and radio broadcasts (Aburish 1998, 42-3). And so they adopted a Palestinian identity, fought for a Palestinian state, and then much of the younger generation of the family emigrated.

The centrality of names as external identity-signifiers is shown by the continuing significance of the Aburish family name, in spite of the dispersal of the family. This is further reinforced by the experience of the philosopher Althusser, as noted in his autobiography. He disliked his name: 'from earliest childhood I bore the name of a

man who still lived and was loved in my mother's thoughts: it was a dead man's name' (1994, 54). And so he was thrilled when his name was temporarily changed when he went to school in the countryside (1994, 79).

The example of the Aburish family, and its dispersal around the world, illustrates one of the ways in which identity has been analysed as dependent on either fixity or movement (Rapport and Dawson 1998, 21, 27). The physical or built environment can play an important part in identity construction (Rabinowitz 1997, 24-51; Rapport and Dawson 1998, 21). Jerusalem epitomises a locality which is far more than just a geographic location, being the inspiration for those with very different self-definitions. It forms an example of how 'geography could be manipulated, invented, characterized, over and above the site's physical reality' (Said 1998, 3).

Ideas about home and self may be conceptualised through the use of narrative and myth, clearly vital to migrants but also to the rest of society as well (Rapport and Dawson 1998, 28, 30, 33). For the members of the Aburish family, which now includes sixteen nationalities, this means that they still think of themselves as Palestinians - even if any connection is very minimal. At the end of his account of the Aburish family, the author tried to explain what had formed the Palestinian identity: 'however well-meaning the British colonial attitude, it was one of master and slave that was followed by the oppression by Jordan when it ruled us, rejection by other Arabs, and the Israeli insistence that we do not exist: it is these elements which have created the Palestinian identity' (Aburish 1998, 42).

Perhaps, therefore, one of the crucial issues affecting that of identity is the political situation, especially when that involves colonialism and imperialism. Such situations rely on the creation of difference (Said 1994, 9; Moore-Gilbert 1997, 197), and infuse the thought, art and literature of both the powerful and the powerless societies involved in the 'relationship'. One of the most renowned writers on the iniquity of such a

situation is Said, who has shown how culture can play a fundamental role in colonial/imperialist situations:

‘at the margins of Western society, all the non-European regions whose inhabitants, societies, histories and beings represented a non-European essence, were made subservient to Europe, which in turn demonstrably continued to control what was not Europe, and represented the non-European in such a way as to sustain control’ (Said 1994, 106).

At the same time, it has been argued that Said has over-simplified relationships between west and east, between the ruler and the ruled (MacKenzie 1995). Thus Orientalism may not have influenced western thought and culture in any negative sense, but instead may have involved innocent interest and respect (see MacKenzie 1995, 211).

Even if some of the edge is removed from Said’s argument, there are examples of the ways in which colonialist/imperialist preconceptions have affected approaches to the non-western, and even the outcome of any research. For example, Bourdieu can be argued to have used his studies of Algerian and French society as comparisons based upon traditional assumptions, despite his assertions to the contrary (Reed-Danahay 1996). Amongst the Kabyle in Algeria, Bourdieu chose not to examine the role of state institutions (for example, Koranic schools), whilst centralising the role of such institutions in his studies of France (Reed-Danahay 1996, 75). Hence Bourdieu ‘depended upon essentialized categories of the mundane and the exotic, modern and traditional, even when inverting these categories’ (Reed-Danahay 1996, 67), and ‘his occidentalisms in France were twinned with orientalist conceptions of the Kabyle’ (1996, 80). Thus a sociologist with an aim of being ‘detached’ (Reed-Danahay 1996, 66) can enter into the arena of stereotypical attitudes upon which the colonial powers depended.

It is ironic that the fight for self-rule by those oppressed under colonial/imperial powers also relies on the assertion of difference. Nationalist movements depend on the belief that a certain area can be shared only by those who accept a certain identity. As Anderson noted (1994, 6), this concept of shared identity may be imagined, but this

does not make it any less important as a motivator. Assertions of difference form a fundamental organizational feature in society, 'a necessary feature of collective life' (Turner 1994, 95), in spite of anxiety over the possible negative results of such assertions of difference. In the case of Said, who has argued against the delineation of difference (1995), his own political opinions seem to depend upon difference in the struggle for Palestinian state-hood (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 191).

Indeed, difference is clearly essential to self-definition and is necessarily of use to the oppressor as well as the oppressed (see Rattansi 1994, 57). For the oppressed, any collective identity may be crucial in seeking an improved quality of life. An economic situation can be a primary source of such a collective identity (see Bondi 1996, 90-1), and just being in a minority can also give a shared focus for identity, whether that be due to a shared culture or belief system (Wallerstein 1993, 82; Bhabha 1995b, 307). Thus in an article about xenophobia/xenophilia, Bammer (1995, 59) wrote 'things that appear separate or even opposite, (xenophobia/xenophilia, say), are often just variants of the same base impulse: the anxiety over difference, the uneasy encounter with the racially, ethnically, or culturally defined other'.

National conflicts can be crucial in fermenting an apparently more clear-cut self-definition. A study of Arab students' answers to the question 'Who am I' showed that in the period during the October War, 1973, their positive feelings about themselves rose. Not surprisingly, there was an increase in their politicisation, and in hostility towards Israel and the West. These feelings were, however, speedily realigned by May 1974 with a 16.7% decrease in national identification (Starr 1978, 454-6). Conflicts necessarily require the 'designation of official enemies' (Said 1995, 332). They polarise people into opposing identities, as has been seen in the 'War on Terror' initiated since September 11 2001. This does not pass without comment, and the 'clash of civilizations' so popular amongst politicians at the moment has been eloquently criticised: for example, 'political leaders who section off humanity into various

“worlds” stand to make the world more flammable’ (Sen 2001). Yet, as with the inscription at Nice, and in the Egyptian past as well, apparently polarised self-definition is a necessary feature of conflict.

In situations of conflict it may be easier to define who the other is, at least for the war-mongers, but it is always something entirely subjective, and can cover divisions on the basis of language, nation, geography, skin colour or politics (Minh-ha 1997, 217). For those following a nomadic existence, the other may be the sedentary world (Okely 1996), whilst for others matters of sexuality or gender may be of far more relevance (Rattansi 1994, 47). This has been well recognised in feminist studies, for example Beauvoir (1954, 91) wrote ‘what place has humanity made for this portion of itself, which, while included within it, is defined as the Other? What rights have been conceded to it? How have men defined it?’. Literature, tradition, education, religion and women themselves have all been identified as enabling and furthering the position of women as the other (see El-Saadawi 1980). These many permutations on self/other show the relevance of Bhabha’s statement that the other ‘is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously “between ourselves”’ (1995a, 4). Some of these discourses are problematic to discern in the distant past.

Particularly relevant to this thesis, alongside the influence of a political situation on identity, are the influences of religion and the past on self-definition. Religion has long been seen as a factor in the assertion of self and other. It can enable social solidarity (Russell 1985 [1949], 15) and can be closely tied to political contingencies. One of the many settings in which this is the case is Saudi Arabia, where religion, alongside tribal identity, is an important factor in uniting the country under the royal family. The religious establishment is thus compelled to confer legitimacy on the royal family (Nevo 1998, 34-5, 46, 48, 50). A hostile context can also lead to a reassertion of religious identity (see Kabbani 1989). Christianity itself arose despite perennial political

hostility, and could lead to a renunciation of the past. This was of interest to Foucault who examined the effect of monastic and Stoic traditions on early Christianity. He (1988, 43) showed how penitence of sin led both to the revealing of self as well as the destruction of self - 'a break with one's past identity'.

In general, it is agreed that the past can be of huge relevance in the formation of present identity, whether for individuals, nations or minorities (Wallerstein 1993, 78; Shack 1995, 115; Jones 1996, 62). This can be motivated by a rejection as well as an incorporation of the past. It has also been argued that it is possible for communities to exist without an awareness of the past (Furedi 1993, 63), and 'the retreat into the past in order to find self-justification reflects a desire to escape from the present and evade its challenges' (Furedi 1993, 69).

The creation of pasts as an aspect of colonial/imperial attempts to impose an identity on themselves and their 'subjects' seems to have been a central part of colonial/imperial rule (Ranger 1994, 227). Use of the past by the oppressed to counteract the past presented by the powerful may merely represent an equally manipulative attitude to the past (Furedi 1993, 69), but it is proving an effective basis for the assertion of identity by the powerless (Murray 1993, 108; Lowenthal 1994, 310). Forums for the assertion of a particular past include heritage centres which also serve to demonstrate the supposed accessibility of that past (Fowler 1995, 129-39; Lowenthal in Ingold et al 1998, 209).

The role of variant interests in allowing access to a particular past is exemplified by the case of modern Egypt. Study of Egypt's pharaonic past by the Egyptians themselves was not encouraged by the colonial powers, and, at times, actively discouraged (Reid 1985, 233; Wood 1998, 181-2, 189). In his autobiography, the activist Salama Musa wrote about how the British prevented the Egyptians from learning about ancient Egypt at school, as they thought it would create an 'undue sense of pride and glory, and even

foster the demand for independence' (Musa 1961, 50). At intervals during the twentieth century, the pharaonic past has been appealed to by the Egyptians in order to create a sense of separate-ness, especially following the 1922 declaration of independence (Reid 1985, 240; Haarlem 1988, 99; Wood 1998, 180, 182). This is seen with reference to the Misr al-Fatah movement in which the ideology of pharaonism played a part (Wood 1998, 183-4). Yet pan-Arabism and Islam came to be of far more importance, and in neither was there a place for appeals to a pharaonic past (Roussillon 1998, 370-3). Thus, in contemporary Egypt, the ancient past is of minimal concern to the majority of the population (Hassan 1998, 214).

Nevertheless ancient Egypt's past is not devoid of contemporary relevance, as is seen by the attitudes of some contemporary Copts and the Afrocentrists, amongst others. These potent links, as felt by a contemporary Egyptian woman, were expressed thus: 'I am African and Arab and Egyptian because my genes were drawn from all these, because my history goes back to Egypt for seven thousand years, to Isis and Ma'at and Noon' (El-Saadawi 1998, 127). Thus, despite many exceptions, a belief in connections to such distant pasts can be vital to the present self-definition of an individual (Bhabha 1995b, 307). Hence Lowenthal (1997, 182-3) emphasised the importance of the 'I was here first' declarations of identity in debates over antiquities, land rights or political recognition.

Symbols of such a past can also become central to self-definition, whether they be photographs or national treasures (Lowenthal 1995, 42). One of the most overt symbols of national identity is the national flag (Lewis 1998, 107-11). Unsurprisingly, therefore, a frequent method of protest against the actions of the West is through burning the USA flag. Personal and collective identity can also be proclaimed by symbols supposedly steeped in tradition. This is seen in matters such as personal dress, for example the wearing of the tartan in Scotland (Trevor-Roper 1994, 35-41).

The self-definition of an individual, community or nation operates at many different levels, but at the same time the assertion of self can be expressed with clarity and be reflective of a real situation. The role of the state, both in promoting a forthright statement of identity, and in attempting to affect the ways in which those within its borders define themselves, is vital. Thus, ideology can be central in the transmission and definition of self.

Ideology

This is a term which, as in the case of ethnicity, can be a source of endless definition and re-definition (for example see the list of definitions in Gabel 1997, 133-5). Broadly, it has been defined as 'a system of ideas which express without reciprocity the more or less legitimate interests....of an economic, political, or ethnic entity' (Gabel 1997, 136). The lack of agreement on a definition for ideology is reflected in the literature by the differing analyses of how it actually works in society (if at all).

Ideology has been assessed as a means of justifying the control of society by a dominant group. It can thus conceal inequalities and injustices in society (Hodder 1995, 63). Althusser wrote at length about the 'ideological state apparatuses' which can be comprised by structures such as religion and education. He distinguished the 'ideological state apparatuses' from the 'repressive apparatuses' such as the army or prisons, as the former function by ideology first and violence second, and the latter vice-versa (Althusser 1993, 17-9). Ideology can, therefore, be intimately bound up with power, Althusser condemning 'ideological state apparatuses' as contributing 'to the capitalist relations of exploitation' (1993, 28). Such 'ideological state apparatuses' are, however, relevant to pre-capitalist societies as well. For example, Althusser (1993, 25) identified the church in the Middle Ages as the main method of justification for the powerful elite.

As Hodder pointed out, however, it is necessary to question the effectiveness of such means of control and to acknowledge the potential for independent ideas and resistance (1995, 67). With reference to ancient Egypt, Egyptologists have been accepting of statements made by the ancient Egyptian elite, when the ancient Egyptian themselves may not have been, and when the statements had little basis in reality (see Baines 1996b, 360). Furthermore, ideology need not be limited to the state, but can be linked to any group in society (Hodder 1992, 208-10), as in Coptic Egypt where more than one 'official' ideology could run concurrently.

Nor do ideological statements need to be expressed through written or spoken language, but can be equally powerfully made through the use of material symbols. A definition of ideology of use in an archaeological context is 'the use of symbols in relation to interest' (Hodder 1992, 208). In the modern world, materialism was identified as the defining characteristic of western 1960s society, whereby objects formed 'a system determined entirely by an ideological regime of production and social integration' (Baudrillard 1997, 162-3). Through the communicative role of objects and their spatial context, behaviour and living patterns can be affected (Bourdieu 1977, 89).

Foucault took a less dogmatic view than Althusser on the role of ideology in society. He questioned whether the term should be used at all, arguing that it should be replaced by looking at discourses in society which may be true or false (1986, 118). Thus ideology should not be viewed simply as something opposed to truth, but instead should be assessed as part of a complicated network of not necessarily iniquitous power relations (Foucault 1986, 140-2; Bhabha 1995a, 3).

Power was rather the essential element to society, an integral part of family, knowledge and technology (for example, Foucault 1986, 122; Turner 1994, 21; Bond and Gilliam 1994, 20). Thus, the capabilities of a state, however powerful, are always going to be limited as the state 'for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to

occupy the whole field of power relations' (Foucault 1986, 122). One of these forms of power was 'pastoral power', that exercised by Christianity, which, according to Foucault 'proposed and spread new power relations throughout the ancient world' (2002, 333). A more encompassing analysis of the way in which societies function results from this multi-faceted evaluation of ideology:

'But what makes the domination of a group, a caste, or a class, together with the resistance and revolts that domination comes up against, a central phenomenon in the history of societies is that they manifest in a massive and global form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking-together of power relations with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction' (Foucault 2002, 348).

Despite Foucault's dislike of the term ideology, his insights about power and knowledge allow a much wider understanding of ideology. Althusser's definition is appropriate for an investigation into ideologies of the elite, but it is also necessary to look at the ways in which ideologies are resisted, and denied throughout society. Furthermore, the communication of alternative ideologies, or of the apparent acceptance of official ideologies in textual as well as non-textual forms, is of relevance.

Absorbing the background and reaching the sources

The aim of this thesis, unravelling the influences on self-definition during two hugely disparate periods, means that different types of evidence are considered together in a way which has not been attempted before. The groundswell of studies on ancient Egyptian life-patterns and identity have been primarily concerned with enumerating those lives. For the Coptic period, the evidence is all too frequently segregated into categories, so that a great deal is written about the monastic (in particular the Pachomian) life, increasingly including theoretical perspectives, whilst the rest of the population is little noticed. Thus, for the Coptic period, evidence from different communities is investigated side by side, wherever possible.

Considering the New Kingdom alongside an era which witnessed Christianity is crucial to the argument of this thesis. It provides an apparently vast contrast, in time and in ideologies. Writers have emphasised the contrast between New Kingdom Egypt and Judeo-Christian beliefs (for example see Meskell 2002, 143); in this thesis it is seen just how far those beliefs did affect life in Egypt. The thesis aims to provide new insight into the configuration of self-definition in contrasting political situations, and to evaluate the power of official ideologies.

The wealth of writing on the modern delineation of identity allows an awareness of the influence which a political situation or religious belief may have on the overt self-definition of an individual. These insights allow the full potential of the source material to be utilised, giving a framework in which to lay the argument. The material used in this thesis is approached with the whole weight of modern pre-conceptions, but the intention is to allow the material to speak for itself, as far as that is possible. This means that certain aspects of self-definition are much more clearly witnessed than others. The material is organised into categories which arose from the reading of the evidence.

The source material has been chosen for its potential in revealing different perspectives, both official and non-official, on self-definition. The two sections of the thesis, New Kingdom and Coptic, mirror each other and are linked, in that the same types of evidence are used. These are formed by textual evidence (Chapters 2 and 4), in particular letters, and by the non-textual, two urban sites, Memphis for New Kingdom Egypt (Chapter 3) and Thebes for Coptic Egypt (Chapter 5). The thesis is thus dependent upon published material, some of it well-known, some of it not. This evidence is integrated in order to achieve a new perspective on the enduring problem of self-definition.

CHAPTER TWO

SELF-DEFINITION IN THE NEW KINGDOM TEXTUAL WORLD

The written word was central to the New Kingdom state. The ability to participate fully in written discourse defined a person's status within Egyptian society, and literacy was an ideal which many strived to attain. As a means of articulating power, and asserting the values of the state, texts were much used. At the same time, the written word could also be a vehicle for questioning the state itself. The different scripts of ancient Egyptian highlight the different functions of the textual in Egypt, with hieroglyphs primarily for the monumental and hieratic for the less formal. Accessing extant texts from this era in Egyptian history allows an insight into the formulation of self during a period of imperial might and decline. Letters are the focus of this chapter, selected as a body of evidence because they derive from across the spectrums of literate society, including highly crafted statements and seemingly more spontaneous messages. They are studied in order to expose the means of self-expression open to a literate Egyptian living in what would appear to have been a tightly defined society.

The context

Uniting the years 1550 -1070 under the term 'New Kingdom' suggests a cohesive era in which stability and centralised power were the norm. The timespan is vast, however, and political and religious changes were by no means unknown (Assmann 1996, 225-315). Furthermore, much of the historical detail is still debated and uncertain, especially regarding the transitions between different monarchs. This is particularly the case in understanding the accession of Hatshepsut, the female king. As in the Coptic period, an era more frequently associated with change, there were power struggles and phases in which segments of the population were vulnerable to attack and in which the religious beliefs of the population changed (see for example Assmann

1995, 190-210). Thus it has often been asserted that, contrary to expectations, Egyptian society was subject to change in both the short and long term (see Robins 1999, 55): 'change was of the essence in Egyptian culture' (Baines 1997, 217).

The reign of Akhenaten (1353 - 1335) is the most obvious period in which change was imposed on Egypt (although it is also clear that there was resistance to the reforms - see Bomann 1991, 74), and as such has inspired a huge quantity of research. Detailed studies of the texts, art and architectural forms of other stages in the New Kingdom have also put Akhenaten's reign in a general context of development (see for example, Assmann 1995, 67-8 on the religious aspect).

The 18th dynasty was itself a reactionary period in which the previous rulers, the Hyksos, were cast in a negative light or even omitted entirely from the record (Redford 1995, 158-9 - as in Hatshepsut's reign). Instead, the new rulers sought to set themselves in the same mould as the 12th dynasty rulers, and embarked on conquests abroad, ever expanding Egypt's territories (see Galán 1995). Egypt's empire extended both to the north and to the south of the country, into Syria-Palestine and Nubia (see maps in Manley 1996, 69, 71, 73; Figure 1), and throughout the New Kingdom these borders would fluctuate and recede. In such territories visible witnesses to Egypt's presence were erected under many of the 18th and 19th dynasty kings. In Nubia this was characterised by Egyptian temples, the most renowned being Abu Simbel, but in Syria-Palestine the Egyptian presence was far more low-key and on a much smaller scale (see Kemp 1978 for a comparison of the different expressions of imperialism in Nubia and Syria-Palestine; see Wimmer 1990 for an evaluation of the evidence for Egyptian temples in Canaan).

These conquests also affected Egypt internally, with an increase in the power of the temples and the military, both of which were fundamental to imperialist ambitions (Baines 1995, 23, 34; see O'Connor 1992, 208 for a plan of the structure of



government). In this the king was still the focus of the political system, although the power relations were delicate, with the military and the priesthood sometimes the main power-brokers. Horemheb, for example, was a military general (Baines 1995, 29-30) but ruled Egypt between 1319-1307, at the very end of the 18th dynasty. Through the course of the 19th dynasty the temple lands increased in size. By the 20th dynasty it was the temple of Amun at Karnak which exerted most power in Upper Egypt, under a hereditary priesthood (Lesko 1991, 111).

The actual legitimation of kingship developed in the New Kingdom as well (Hasel 1998, 17-21; Robins 2001, 286, 288). This was an essential element to kingship: 'however monolithic and even indispensable a major institution is and however much it displays its self-assurance, it must continually reaffirm its right to exist' (Baines 1995, 7). The king was more closely linked with the sun-god (Redford 1995, 171), and in the reign of Akhenaten it became the king who had the sole rights of interaction with the god (Baines 1991, 189; Redford 1995, 177). The 'height' of the nineteenth dynasty, during the reign of Ramesses II, saw the king worshipped as a living ruler, something which was not without precedent (see Murnane 1995, 185).

Any religious developments in the New Kingdom impacted both on the position of the king (Baines 1995, 34) and on the beliefs of the Egyptians who seem to have been more able to interact personally with the divine world (Sadek 1988, 293-5). At least, there is much more evidence relating to personal belief practices than during earlier periods in Egypt (Baines 1991, 180-6). Certainly during the late New Kingdom (second part of the 20th dynasty) religious beliefs could operate more freely with much less recourse to the king (Baines 1991, 198; 2001, 3). Egypt itself has been termed a moral entity, in which religion was the main unifying force, the basis of 'nationalisme pharaonique' (Drioton 1957, 377-9). Thus 'il n'y avait pas de racisme, on le voit, au fond du nationalisme pharaonique, mais une philosophie religieuse universaliste,

accueillante pour ceux qui l'acceptaient, intolérante pour ceux qui la repoussaient' (Drioton 1957, 379).

The actual population of Egypt has been estimated at approximately 4,500,000 (O'Connor 1992, 190). This included non-Egyptians who occupied as wide a range of roles as the Egyptians themselves. Thus some had to undertake forced labour, whilst others rose through the bureaucratic echelons (for example Roive 1940, 46). For the majority in Egypt, whose occupations are revealed by the Wilbour Papyrus (Gardiner 1948), life was one tied to the land with bouts of military service, but the ideal of correct treatment was nonetheless maintained by the elite (O'Connor 1992, 194).

The literate world

As this chapter is concerned with how the literate in New Kingdom Egypt defined themselves, the state, their relationship to it, and those who fell outside the state, it inevitably excludes those who were unable to enter the textual domain, or those whose texts the accidents of history have not preserved. The gap between the written and the spoken word in ancient Egypt may have been vast (Roccatti 1980, 77-9). For example, Coptic preserves in written form a large number of local dialects within Egypt, which are not reflected within the monolithic and linguistically centralised world of the ancient Egyptian text.

Written Egyptian would have been 'like a foreign language for many' (Baines 1983, 581). This difference would have served to emphasise the hierarchical structure of Egyptian society, in which the 'core elite is identified with literacy' (Baines 1983, 584). The main written language during the New Kingdom was Late Egyptian which is first evidenced during Akhenaten's reign (Junge 2001, 18-23; Parkinson 1999a, 48-9). This was a development from Middle Egyptian, the classic language which continued to be used during the New Kingdom, for example in the transmission of Middle Kingdom

literature. Late Egyptian differs from Middle Egyptian in terms of grammatical structure, orthography and in vocabulary (Parkinson 1999a, 50, 55).

Despite the gap between spoken and written Egyptian, the distinctions between literate and non-literate might have been more nuanced, with the apparently literate elite employing others to do their writing for them (although the king genuinely may have been literate), and with many levels of literacy possible (Baines and Eyre 1983, 77; Baines 1983, 580, 584). At the same time, it has been hypothesised that a maximum 1% of the entire population in ancient Egypt were literate, with local variability possible: thus in Deir el Medina there may have been 5% literate (Baines and Eyre 1983, 90-1). It has also been asserted that most of the literate in Egypt would only have been able to read hieratic (Parkinson 1999a, 71). For some, giving such a low estimate for literacy in ancient Egypt has been taken as an insult to the civilization which they study. This was expressed by Lesko (1990, 657): 'This guess at a literacy rate is misleading at best and at worst appears as an unnecessary and uncalled for patronizing attempt to denigrate the substantial achievement of one of history's greatest civilizations and for that matter to impugn the importance that most civilized people attributed to literacy'. Clearly, such views are more concerned with trying to glorify ancient Egypt than in trying to understand how literacy operated in that context.

The issue of how far women should be included among the literate in ancient Egypt has also been addressed. While it has been noted that there was apparently no bar to women reading and writing, at whatever level, it has also been argued that women would have used it primarily for cultural and not functional reasons (Baines and Eyre 1983, 84-5). This has been disputed (Bryan 1985, 32), with literate women potentially having similar possibilities and motivations as literate men. For example, in the tombs of non-royal men and women, a signifier of the 'cultured elite', the scribal palette, is depicted with women as well as men (Bryan 1985, 24-5).

The stark figure of 1% of the Egyptian population literate provides a necessary reminder of just how inaccessible the thoughts and motivations (as expressed in written form) of the vast majority of the ancient Egyptians are today. Yet, while accepting that literate society itself was a miniscule proportion of the population, it is also necessary to understand the wider influence of the literate. A much larger proportion of the Egyptian population would have been able to access someone who had some degree of literacy.

The contrast between literacy and illiteracy is further narrowed by the possibility that the majority of Egyptian fictional works originated from oral culture. In turn, the written form of those 'stories' could then have been transmitted by one literate person to many other less literate and illiterate people. Ancient Egypt has thus been identified as a society which was dominated by literacy (see Janssen 1992). Such a conclusion seems inescapable when faced with the extant material past of ancient Egypt, upon which the written intruded at every opportunity. For example, temples were covered with texts, hieroglyphs were central to art forms and papyri and ostraca documented different aspects of Egyptian life. Nevertheless, the apparent omnipresence of texts must not obscure the majority for whom this was a closed world.

Here, however, the ways in which ideas about self and other found textual form is of concern. Of necessity, those who produced the written texts are the focus of this chapter. Thus Assmann's (1999, 8) statement (made with particular reference to the Middle Kingdom) is very relevant:

'scribal culture was held representative of culture in general. Unlike India, where every caste developed its own system of values and code of honor, Egypt did not develop a stratified system of different cultural codes. The scribal class embodied in a representative way all the culturally relevant values and moral codes. The scribe was the exemplary Egyptian'.

Yet it should also be remembered that the scribe may only have been the 'exemplary Egyptian' amongst his own circle, the literate elite, outside of which there may have been far-removed cultural values.

The actual interpretation of Egyptian texts involves several different levels of understanding. Even when the philology of a text is relatively understood, there can still be a huge gap in accessing the intentions behind different statements. Quirke (1998, vii-viii) has emphasised the inevitably varied modern interpretations of ancient Egyptian texts: 'if the world of the ancient Egyptians is long past and their ancient language in its classical forms no longer spoken, the world and the languages of Egyptology remain subject to change. There can be no fixed viewpoint, no final lexicography'.

The difficulties faced when trying to understand the intentions behind written statements are immense. This is not solely a result of the antiquity of the texts. Similar problems were faced by Abu-Lughod (1988) when studying oral literature in a Bedouin village in the Western desert in Egypt. In this she tried to understand why it was possible for statements to be made in one medium (poetry) which were entirely contrary to the moral ideals (honour and modesty) of the society as a whole. Reasons suggested include the social context in which these opposing statements were made and the possibility that there were actually two concurrent dominant ideologies in Bedouin society (Abu-Lughod 1988, 233-59).

Literary theory developed for more modern texts can be of use in the ancient Egyptian context as well, as the questions raised by the texts may be related. Issues such as intertextuality and reception have been looked at in Egyptian textual sources (Loprieno 1996, 222-31). The identification of set patterns within the texts has enhanced levels of understanding, and the terminology applied to such themes further enables comparative work. Loprieno's work has been central in the development of these new approaches (see Baines 1996b, 374-5), and in the attempt to clarify the different purposes and types of Egyptian text (Assmann 1999, 2). In particular, his application of the terms 'topos' (the ideology of society passed on by its officials) and 'mimesis' (the individual's

response to such ideology) has been crucial in highlighting the gap between texts and 'reality' (Loprieno 1988, 10-3; 1996, 217). The 'topos' of the foreigner in literary texts could then be compared with the 'mimesis' of the foreigner (Loprieno 1988, 15-40, 97).

The layers of decorum and self-aggrandisement generated by the different international powers during the New Kingdom have been compared and contrasted. In this work, carried out by Liverani (1990), the terms 'prestige' and 'interest' proved to be the key to understanding differences between texts. Thus the contrasts between the sources, whereby the Egyptians could condemn all non-Egyptians but could also make treaties with non-Egyptians, can be explained through the purposes of the sources. In the first situation, only Egyptians were addressed, therefore 'prestige' was to be enhanced, whereas in the second situation the 'interest' of Egypt was served through interaction with non-Egyptians (Liverani 1990, 25).

Textual boundaries

Such insights are vital in approaching New Kingdom Egypt. In this period of imperial expansion, and eventually of imperial decline, there was a great textual output, as rulers proclaimed their power and as individuals reflected on the conduct of life. In these texts, boundaries were drawn between the Egyptian and non-Egyptian domain, and the Egyptian world defined as a place in which just order was maintained by an all-powerful king. Certain texts were placed within temples. One of the most powerful expressions of an imperial zeal is the *Poetical Stela of Thuthmose III* (Lacau 1909, 17-21, pl. vii; Figure 5), found in the Karnak temple. In this, Amun-Re was the narrator, describing how he had enabled Thuthmose III to overwhelm all foreigners. Such a statement probably had more validity during Thutmose III's reign than at any other point in the New Kingdom, yet the hyperbole is still apparent as the Egyptian king is portrayed as a ruthless, conquering hero (which no doubt he was whenever he had the

chance) against any non-Egyptian for whom each victory was never in question. Throughout the New Kingdom, in texts celebrating victories over non-Egyptians, the king was continually hailed in such a light, even when the realities of imperial power were far distant. Thus the king's power could be proclaimed when at the same time his power was relatively non-existent (see O'Connor 1992, 204; Late Ramesside period texts in for example, Peden 1994, contrasted with Piankh's comments below). Only one side of a situation was elucidated, as Liverani has demonstrated with reference to the many representations of tribute bearers approaching the king, seen in tombs and temples (1973, 193). These representations, showing non-Egyptians in homage before the Egyptian king, were not counterbalanced by similar representations of Egyptians kneeling before a non-Egyptian ruler with gifts. Furthermore, many of the non-Egyptian tribute bearers may really have been traders who were only portrayed as tribute bearers so that the Egyptian world-view was not threatened (Kemp and Merrillees 1980, 280).

Despite the monolithic certainties presented in monumental inscriptions, there was also room for exploring different attitudes to Egyptian ideology. This is demonstrated by the fictional *Tale of Wenamun* and the *Contendings of Horus and Seth*. Both narratives date to the 'second phase' of New Kingdom Egyptian literature, thus to after the Amarna period (Baines 1996c, 157).

The *Tale of Wenamun* (Gardiner 1932, 61-76), possibly written during the 21st dynasty (therefore just after the end of the New Kingdom), at a time of weak central power, was a fictional tale in the style of a documentary text, whose end is lost (Assmann 1999, 1; Baines 1999b). Yet the extant text, superficially a first person account of a trip to collect timber from Byblos, can be understood as undermining the Egyptian abroad (in particular the Upper Egyptian), exposing the demise of Egyptian prestige. For an Egyptian audience, the tale explored motifs and themes of central concern to them:

‘an Egyptian puts forward in direct fashion what one may describe as the Egyptian colonialist ideology. An ironic response in the mouth of a foreigner, in a text addressed to an Egyptian audience, is a device that focuses on the gap between ideology and reality in Egyptian political claims. The foreigner has the privilege of directly denying a dogma, that an Egyptian must approach in a more roundabout way’ (Eyre 1999b, 239).

This text also served to reinforce to an Egyptian audience what it actually meant to be an Egyptian by putting an Egyptian in a non-Egyptian context (see Assmann, A, 1999, 89).

The *Contendings of Horus and Seth* (Gardiner 1932, 37-60) could be interpreted as challenging certain givens in Egyptian official ideologies. This was a literary fiction in which the petty rivalries of the divine world appear to be ridiculed (and in which, incidentally, the writing of letters plays a crucial role). To the modern reader it can be hard to equate the intensely awe-inspiring images of the deities in Egyptian temples with the antics of the deities in this tale. This apparent contradiction may not have been read as such by the ancient Egyptian, for whom the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* may have been a serious fiction, without all the humour which the text conveys today. If it was, however, humorous and satirical to the ancient Egyptian as well (which seems hard to deny), then the text could either have stemmed from less official culture, or could have been as central to official culture as the more ‘expected’ aspects of the Egyptian religious world. Kemp has put forward this latter interpretation: ‘it is more appropriate to accept the *Contendings* as belonging to mainstream culture, the complexity of which is only occasionally revealed’ (2001, 129).

Literature as a context for questioning the state, for exploring accepted beliefs, was not limited to the Ramesside period, but had a long history. Middle Kingdom literature has been similarly approached, but in Parkinson’s analysis of it as a mechanism for debate he also noted that in the end, Egyptian values were upheld: ‘this analysis of literature as a discourse of resistance against official norms is, however, partial, since literary texts do not exclusively concern what is problematic. They are, by their written nature, part

of the official culture and cannot be considered “subversive”. For all that they concern unparadigmatic phenomena, they usually end up reaffirming the status quo’ (1999b, 71). Nevertheless, such texts do illustrate a willingness on the part of the literate to explore and debate their situation, their condition. There was no blind acceptance of their role and purpose in life.

The literate also took it upon themselves to write instruction texts outlining the correct conduct of life, the ideals to which an Egyptian was to aspire. According to Kemp (1995, 50), there was not ‘a distinctively religious way of conducting one’s life’, yet these texts provided the terms of reference for a literate Egyptian seeking to identify with the acceptable ways of approaching life. Closely linked to instruction texts were autobiographical texts, inscribed in tombs, in which individuals sought to confirm that they had fulfilled the requirements of what it meant to be a loyal Egyptian, serving the state.

Both forms of text confirmed an Egyptian sense of identity enhanced through correct behaviour. In the 19th dynasty *Instruction of Any* (a partial copy of which was found at Deir el Medina) it was acknowledged that such instructions were difficult to follow, but necessary and possible. This instruction (Suys 1935), argued by Lichtheim (1997, 30) to have been written by someone of the ‘middle class’ in contrast to earlier texts, provided advice to a son. He was urged to treat others well, to act mildly and with restraint even towards those who challenged him. For example, he was to marry, have a son, study, act properly towards his mother and the gods, make preparations for his burial, and make offerings to his parents after their death, but was also to respond calmly when reproved by a superior, even when unjustly reproved.

The low-key life envisaged in the instruction text above, in which an individual fulfilled on a local/personal level the ideals of the centralised state, stands in stark contrast to the autobiography of Ahmose son of Abana (Sethe 1906, 1-11). This individual was a

soldier who fought under Ahmose, Amenhotep I and Thutmose I, at a crucial period at the beginning of the New Kingdom. Thus he helped to expel the Hyksos and expand Egypt's borders. His description of his life was composed solely of his military actions, perceived as the most praiseworthy aspect of his life. All his military exploits were related, and the text sought to demonstrate how Ahmose had worked in the service (and more importantly, in the presence) of the king and state all his life, that he died in old age still in the favour of the king.

These idealised perceptions of life, with individuals firmly placing themselves within the Egyptian state, showing a collective sense of how life should be conducted, were mirrored by the realities of life, in which the perceived failures of individuals were catalogued by those who restrained them. Despite the self-proclaimed omnipotence of the king, there were those who would not conform, acting against the state. For example, some of those who systematically robbed the kings' tombs in Thebes (during the reign of Ramesses IX), were themselves state officials.

The investigation into the robberies, and the justice served on the culprits, was carefully recorded (see Peet 1930; Peden 1994, 225-59). The robberies occurred at a time when the power of the state was diminished, but there is also evidence that tomb robbing was a problem during earlier phases of the New Kingdom (Kemp 1995, 38). The punishment of those who plotted to assassinate Ramesses III was similarly described and recorded in great detail; presumably the punishments of those involved (from the king's innermost circle) were held up as a warning.

These texts demonstrate the attempts of the state to contain those within its borders, to maintain an ordered hierarchical world. At the same time, they bear witness to an inevitable inability to achieve these aims. From the evidence, it is clear that the literate, the different levels of the elite, were amongst those who challenged the state. The Turin Strike Papyrus (see Edgerton 1951; Frandsen 1990; McDowell 1999, 235-8) records

those at Deir el Medina carrying out a sustained series of protests at the king's failure to pay them proper rations (during the reign of Ramesses III). This set of protests was led by those who were amongst the elite workforce of the king, the literate.

Formal texts reveal, therefore, a desire to proclaim, uphold, question and undermine the Egyptian state and its ideologies. This was despite the fact that the authors of, and participants in, such texts stemmed from literate society, from similar strata in the hierarchy. As stated by Kemp (2001, 129): 'Is it perhaps normal to exist on the cusp of belief and disbelief, to have only partial engagement with the describable structure of one's own society and beliefs?'. Some level of disagreement was, therefore, an inevitable feature of the negotiation and interpretation of life amongst the literate, but this was set against the background of a tightly defined world united in the person of the king. How far this presentation of life was taken up in letters is examined below.

Letters

This body of evidence is not as unitary as it sounds, as letters were composed for a variety of reasons. Some letters were apparently spontaneous, brief messages whose meaning it is almost impossible to access given the lack of background information, whilst others were highly structured, formalised works. The more formal letters were sometimes later quoted in another type of text (such as an autobiography). As a form of written communication, the participants ranged from the king to government officials and members of the Deir el Medina community. This was reflected in the range of words used in Egyptian for a letter, which covered the more formal letters from the king (which read as commands), as well as letters from non-royal individuals and much more brief communications (Sweeney 2001, 2).

A certain formality in structure encompasses most of the letters, with set phrases and sections. The structure of a letter has been divided into five main parts: introductory

formula, containing the names of the sender and the recipient; greetings and prayers made to various deities on behalf of the recipient of the letter; subject of the letter; closing formula and address (Pleyte 1869, 11, 13-7; Bakir 1970, 31; McDowell 1999, 28; Junge 2001 292-5). Each of these sections could be expanded or shortened according to the motivations of the sender, and certain sections could be omitted altogether (Sweeney 2001, 16-7). The formulaic greetings in a letter seem to have developed after Akhenaten's reign; before this period the writer only asked that the recipient be favoured by the deities, after this period the writer actually performed religious actions on behalf of the recipient (see Baines 2001, 8-9). Those letters without the greetings and prayers made on the recipient's behalf may have been communications which were hand-delivered by the writer of the letter (see Sweeney 2001, 16-7).

In a study of Ramesside letters which were ostensibly from women (twenty-eight in all), Sweeney was able to identify some differences in style, and in the use of formal phrases, from letters supposedly written by men (1998, 1116). In one letter, written in the Late Ramesside period by a chantress of Amun, several of the letter-writing conventions were ignored leading Sweeney (1998, 1117) to ask: 'Was Hennuttawy [the writer of the letter] unaware of the niceties of correspondence? Or was she deliberately manipulating the conventions to produce a more narrative effect?'. It would seem unlikely that the writers of letters in ancient Egypt would not have been able to convey nuances of meaning and intention through subtle changes in formulae or expression.

The conventions surrounding the formulation of a letter were such that formulaic greetings could be the sole message. This has led to frustration amongst the modern editors of such texts, hoping for new 'historical' information, but instead seemingly finding more mundane information in the text. Thus Gardiner (1951, 115) stated:

'in the normal Ramesside letter a substantial portion is devoted to fulsome greetings couched in stereotyped phraseology, and the rest may consist of enquiries after the health of this woman or that child, expressions of anxiety lest the cattle should not have been properly fed, requests for grain or money - in

short domesticities such as occur the world over and shed no light on the peculiar characteristics of Pharaonic civilization’.

It is these very domesticities, however, which can reveal what it actually meant to be a New Kingdom Egyptian. Furthermore, the letters are not devoid of information. For example, Sweeney’s study of the structure of formulaic sections of Late Ramesside letters, and the manipulations of grammar have revealed much about the intricacies of social interaction (see for example Sweeney 2001, 75-6, 99). Baines (2001, 7, 11-2, 27-8) has also argued that the formulaic elements of a letter were not written unthinkingly, but did reflect real religious practices as well as concern for the recipient of a letter. This is exemplified by those letters written during the physical separation of the writer and recipient in which the formulaic greetings were especially detailed due (as put forward by Baines) to the real anxiety inspired by travel, a more risky undertaking in the distant past (Baines 2001, 11-2, 27-8).

A very broad division has been made between different types of letters, in an attempt to understand them better. Thus letters which were primarily written in order to be sent (real letters) have been distinguished from letters which were written as model letters, for instruction (Bakir 1970, 31-2). Red ink was only used in model letters (Bakir 1970, 23). Real letters cover short messages as well as longer letters, and could cover matters of administration, business, personal need, or could be written to maintain a friendship, and could be addressed to one person, or to a group of people. They have been discovered in a variety of contexts, from tomb assemblages to rubbish dumps of settlement sites. Letters were written in Middle/Late Egyptian hieratic on ostraca or papyri (Bakir 1970, 23). In general, letters on ostraca were shorter than letters on papyri (Sweeney 2001, 23). Many of the letters surviving from ancient Egypt are preserved only in copies (see Gardiner 1937, IX). These copies could be on ostraca, papyri, or written in hieroglyphs on stelae for display. When letters became part of a monumental text, for use on a stela delineating a boundary, for example, then their purpose and meaning changed considerably. Noting and assessing the context of a letter is important in trying to reach its original meaning.

Ascertaining whether those identified as the sender and the recipient in a particular letter were actually involved at any stage in the letter is complex. Thus Baines (1999a, 25) has argued for the Old Kingdom that 'the notion that the king would write his own letters is typical of the position of writing among the elite in Egypt (and has later parallels in fiction), but need not necessarily be taken at face value'. Anonymous scribes or officials may have been the only ones who saw a letter in which great protestations of friendship were made. That scribes and officials in Egypt regularly composed or wrote out letters for their superiors is likely, and not actually physically writing a letter oneself could be a source of reproach (see Cerny 1939, 71-4; Wente 1967, 83-5; P.Turin 2026). Baines (2001, 6) has thus used the word 'protagonist' to describe the alleged writer of a letter. In this chapter, the actors involved in a letter are termed 'writer' and 'recipient', even though the named individuals within a letter may, or may not, have been involved in its composition and reception. The New Kingdom fiction, or reality, is thus entered into.

Such was the importance of letter writing in the New Kingdom state that manuals were composed, into which a selection of letters were copied, with the intention that trainee scribes could then learn the ideal forms of a letter (see for example P.Anastasi IV - Gardiner 1937; Caminos 1954, 124). The manuals were circulated across Egypt, as is shown by the presence of the same texts (for example P.Anastasi IV) on ostraca in Deir el Medina, where:

'the villagers were evidently united in their ideas of education and of the educated man. This idea corresponds closely to that manifested in the Late Egyptian miscellanies, most of which stem from the government offices of Memphis, more than 500 kilometres to the north. It seems, therefore, that both teaching methods and curriculum were operative throughout Egypt' (McDowell 2000, 230).

It is frequently the case that the letters in such manuals are now the only source for the ancient original document, if indeed an 'original' existed. Green (1986, 681) argued that these manuals were in fact derived from official archives.

Letter writing itself was not a simple action, but could encompass a whole set of verbal communications as well. With reference to the Old Kingdom, it has been shown that letter writing was seen as a 'performative art', inherently linked to works of literature and fiction: 'a principle that does not exclude people sitting at opposite ends of a courtyard, writing and then presenting letters to one another' (Baines 1999a, 25). The close conjunction of the spoken and the written word involved in Old Kingdom letters may not have disappeared by the New Kingdom either (see Sweeney 2001, 6). This is suggested by the frequency of letters between individuals who lived and worked in close proximity. Thus the purpose and function of a letter in New Kingdom Egypt was not limited to uniting people divided by physical distance.

The majority of letters from the New Kingdom derive from one settlement, that of Deir el Medina, a village on the desert edge in western Thebes (Plate 36). The residents worked on the construction and decoration of the royal tombs, living with their families and dependents in an environment which in many ways was exceptional. Their physical setting was that of one of the foremost cities in Egypt, a centre of royal and religious display. On the east bank of Thebes were the temples of Karnak and Luxor, and on the west bank were mortuary temples, and the royal tombs on which they worked (Figure 82). During the New Kingdom, the built environment of Thebes was continually added to, destroyed and re-shaped by different kings in succession, as each sought to demonstrate his piety and power.

A more direct link between the monumental structures and those from Deir el Medina occurred during the Late Ramesside period (probably during the reign of Ramesses X), when the community moved to live within the walls of Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramesses III (McDowell 1999, 23; Sweeney 2001, 11; Teeter 2002, 1). Here, within the enclosure walls, the residents were safer from attack (from hostile nomads) than when exposed in Deir el Medina, and were also closer to sources of

water, and the cultivation. Many of the letters date from this period, written by those who lived around the temple, surrounded by images of hostile non-Egyptians and texts listing Ramesses III's victories against the Sea Peoples, at a time when Thebes itself was being sporadically raided (Plates 1, 3-4). Two of the main individuals in the Late Ramesside letters are Butehamon and his father Dhutmose, both 'scribes of the tomb', a position of responsibility. Butehamon's house (the remains of which can still be seen in Medinet Habu - Plate 2) appears to have been a comparatively spacious living environment (Cerny 1973, 382) and Cerny thought many of the Late Ramesside letters had been originally found here (1936, 249).

Inevitably, because the majority of extant texts from New Kingdom Egypt stem from Deir el Medina, and because it provides a very rare example of a settlement site, much research has been generated by Deir el Medina material. Amongst such research, there has been an unsurprising tendency to try and view the site as unexceptional. This is despite the clearly above average level of literacy in the community, which arose out of necessity due to the highly skilled and privileged nature of their work.

In the settlement, there may have been a much higher than 5% proportion of literate in the population, including semi-literate (Janssen 1992, 89). This has been inferred from the frequency of short messages (Janssen 1992, 89). These were apparently more likely to have been written by the letter writer her/himself rather than by a scribe. During the Twentieth Dynasty as much as 40% of the community may have been literate (McDowell 1999, 4). Whilst acknowledging the potentially high proportion of literate in Deir el Medina, Lesko suggested that this was not exceptional, arguing for a much higher than previously thought proportion of literate in ancient Egypt as a whole (Lesko 1994, 134 - compare his comments above). Deir el Medina has been suggested as the only valid source from which to estimate literacy amongst the wider population during the New Kingdom. The existence in Deir el Medina of a private library (Pestman 1982), owned by Kenhikhopeshef, in which many of the literary texts of the day were

stored has been thought to demonstrate the potential participation in, and knowledge of, the literary tales current in ancient Egypt by a wider proportion of the population (Lesko 1994, 136).

Similarly the tomb assemblages of the Deir el Medina villagers have been central to a reconstruction of social life in ancient Egypt (Meskell 1999). Meskell has argued that the diversity of the villagers makes them an apt case study applicable to the rest of Egypt: 'the richness of the material presents a vast social mosaic, which is comprised of the experiences of many individuals: elite men and women, servants and slaves, children of various ages, foreigners, the disabled, the elderly and outcast' (Meskell 1999, 4). Inevitably, as with almost any living environment, Deir el Medina had a variety of residents. Nonetheless, the balance of power, and the social relations themselves were altered through the high proportion of highly skilled residents, whose primary work was not the land, but the construction of tombs for the kings of Egypt, and the evidence prioritises these inhabitants. Strudwick (1995, 105) emphasised this imbalance in the evidence from Thebes, where 'it is the lower classes who are the most inconspicuous; in Thebes not even their burial places are obvious'. Yet, as an example of a skilled community working on state projects, Deir el Medina is informative and probably not exceptional: during the New Kingdom there would have been many other such communities, at sites such as Abydos (see Kemp 2001, 126).

The delineation of the world

The royal context

Central to any imposition of power was the need to publicise that power and delineate its boundaries. The king's achievements, and his piety, could be described in texts which were written on stelae. Such stelae were located with little apparent concern for audience. Thus they could be situated high on a rockface, where, even in the unlikely

event of someone being able to read them, their location made this impossible. Instead, their purpose cannot be viewed in terms of propaganda (see Baines 1996b, 347), as understood in the modern sense of the term, but rather as symbolic witnesses to the Egyptian presence (real or not). Border stelae (when outside Egypt) were not simply placed to delineate an immovable point, a line between Egypt and outside (as in the modern world): ‘the stelae that the Egyptian kings set up in foreign lands “extending the borders,” are not regarded in the sources as fixing Egypt’s borders, but as commemorative monuments of the king’s *nḥt* [victory], placed as far as his “expedition of *nḥt* had reached”’ (Galán 1995, 9).

Supposed real documentary texts, letters, could be quoted in texts on stelae. This is seen in other types of texts as well, for example, in autobiographical tomb inscriptions. When used, often in the midst of a more florid text, they added a touch of immediacy, of authenticity, as well as a change of style. They also gave a permanency to a text which otherwise would only have been preserved on papyri or ostraca, and thus demonstrated its importance. When letters copied onto stelae discussed the non-Egyptian, their transformation into a monumental text, written in hieroglyphs, reinforced and sometimes altered the original messages contained within the letters. These stated in unequivocal terms the superiority of the Egyptian over the non-Egyptian, the world depicted as a simple polarisation of Egyptian/order against non-Egyptian/chaos. Furthermore, they also precisely and clearly asserted the power of the Egyptian king, and the divine support maintaining him and his circle.

Three such letters involve the viceroy of Kush. He ruled, on behalf of the king, the area south of Elephantine, as far as (and for a while beyond) the fourth cataract (see Cerny 1959; Warburton 2001, 181, 189). This area as a whole, was seen as a fundamental part of Egypt, with Egyptian temples and monuments constructed at regular intervals throughout (see Kemp 1978), yet at the same time its inhabitants were

seen as a potential threat to the Egyptian state. The ability of the king to extend the borders (*t3š*) of Egypt meant that non-Egyptians could be included within the parameters of Egypt (Galán 1995, 127, 134-5).

Thutmose I speedily sought to contain any disorder stemming from the transition to a new king, by writing to his deputy in Kush, informing him that he had now ascended the throne (Sethe 1906, 79-81; Lacau 1909, 11-3, plate V; Wente 1990, 27, no 15; Cairo Stela 34006; Figure 6). This letter, an assertion by Thutmose I of his newly attained power, also commanded the viceroy to make offerings on his behalf to the gods of Elephantine, as well as letting the viceroy know that his hold on power was firm (see in particular lines 1-2, lines 7- 8). The viceroy had to submit to the king. The text itself was then copied onto a stela, in the Wadi Halfa (just north of the second cataract), and became a permanent witness to the authority of the king over Kush.

A wider assertion of authority was made by Amenhotep II, in a letter written to his viceroy in Kush, User-Satet (Helck 1955, 1343-4; Dunham and Janssen 1960, 17, plate 82; Morschauser 1997, 203-22; Wente 1990, 27-8, no. 16; BMFA Stela 25.632; Figures 7-8). In this, Amenhotep II described his victories over non-Egyptians, and gave advice to his viceroy about dealing with non-Egyptians. The ‘casual cruelty’ (Baines 1999d, 12) of this letter, in that Amenhotep II treated his viceroy in a disparaging way, has been argued to illustrate the point that Egyptians were ‘integrated into the basic subjection of people under authority’ (Baines 1999d, 12).

The letter was constructed in two main parts. In the first section, Amenhotep II detailed how he had overpowered those in the north and the south (lines 3-5), and praised the viceroy for his victories in ‘all foreign countries’ (line 5). He concluded this section by criticising non-Egyptians associated with the viceroy (lines 7-9). In these lines, women were singled out as an apparent source of ridicule, directly associated with cities conquered by Amenhotep II: ‘But as for the woman of Babylon, the servant-girl from

Byblos, the young girl from Alalakh, and the old woman from Arapkha, the people of Takhsi, they are of no account whatsoever. Indeed what is their use?'. Each woman mentioned was depicted as being from a different stage of life, so that the main phases in a woman's life were listed: childhood, adulthood and old age. These women might be a direct caricature of rulers of those countries which had opposed Amenhotep II (see Morschauser 1997, 207). Apparently, it was an insult for a man, a ruler, to be equated with a woman, and seemingly, women could be seen in the same negative light as conquered non-Egyptian men.

In the first section of the letter, therefore, Amenhotep II depicted those from outside Egypt in a derogatory way, at least those non-Egyptians who had opposed his rule. The second section of the letter, in which Amenhotep II warned the viceroy against trusting the Nubians, should, perhaps, be closely linked with the first section (Morschauser 1997, 208). Amenhotep II stated: 'Indeed, do not be lenient with the Nubians; Beware of their people and of their sorcerers' (lines 10-11). Morschauser (1997, 208) thought that this statement was 'not merely an expression of xenophobia; there is also a warning for User-Satet to exhibit a healthy scepticism for these pharaonic underlings'. The translation of *ḥkꜣw* as 'sorcerers' could be taken literally, the magicians from Nubia a fundamental aspect to the general threatening nature of Nubians. Morschauser, however, took the passage to mean that the Nubians were clever with words, therefore the viceroy should be careful of being led astray by the cunning speeches of the Nubians (1997, 208-209).

The association of outsiders with magic is something well-attested in many societies, whereby magical abilities 'are generally attributed to marginal persons, who are feared, despised and frequently persecuted' (Thomassen 1999, 57), but in ancient Egypt magic was not exclusively the realm of non-Egyptians, nor did it have only negative connotations (see Ritner 2001, 322). Yet there is evidence showing the delineation of Nubians as magicians by Egyptians. The execration texts, from the Old Kingdom

onwards, specifically condemned the Nubians, who, it was feared, would turn the magic of these texts against the Egyptians (Ritner 1995, 125). This particular letter has been used as evidence for the Egyptian fear of Nubian magic (Koenig 1987, 105; Ritner 1995, 140) during the New Kingdom; this association is also witnessed in medical texts and in the Book of the Dead (see Koenig 1987, 106-109). The apparent continuity in the perception of Nubians as magicians was such that this theme appears in Demotic texts as well (Koenig 1987, 110), in particular the *Second Setna Tale*, which features a Nubian magician (Ritner 1995, 108, 140). It is also possible to incorporate both implications of *hk3w* into the passage; by choosing such a word to describe the Nubians, there was a suggestion of the malevolent use of magic by non-Egyptians, as well as the warning that it was necessary to be careful when dealing with them at any level. The recipient was thus warned to be on his guard.

While this letter established the boundaries between non-Egyptians and Egyptians, it also demonstrates an acceptance of the necessity of interacting with non-Egyptians, and therefore provided advice on how to deal with non-Egyptians. It was not a closed world. Encounters between Egyptian and non-Egyptian were expected, and were catered for in statements stemming from the king. The letter ended with more advice for User-Satet, criticising him for his choice of an official, then a proverb was quoted and finally Amenhotep II instructed: 'do not listen to their words and do not pay attention to their report' (line 14). Exactly who or what Amenhotep II was referring to remains enigmatic (Morschauser 1997, 203-204), but he may have been urging User-Satet to exert as much care as possible in appointing his deputies in Kush (Morschauser 1997, 219). This comprehensive and instructive letter was copied onto a stela.

Imperial self-assurance, so central to the above letters, also found its way into the third example of a letter transformed into a monumental text and displayed in the midst of imperial territory. This is recorded on a stela dedicated by Ramesses II (Tresson 1922, 10, plate III; Wente 1990, 29, no. 19; Kuban Stela, lines 31-6; Figures 9-10). It was

discovered in the mid-nineteenth century at Kuban, the Egyptian fortress about 108 kilometres south of Aswan (Tresson 1922, vii), and at the top of the round topped stela Ramesses II is depicted making offerings to Horus and Min (Tresson 1922, plate I). The purpose of the text as a whole was to proclaim the success of Ramesses II's initiative to dig a well in the desert on the road to the gold mines (Breasted 1906, 117-23).

To back up Ramesses II's allegations of a successful venture, a letter from his viceroy of Kush describing the construction of the well was quoted in full. The subject of the letter was introduced through the assertion that the 'viceroy of the vile [*hs*] Kush' (line 32) had dispatched a letter. *hs* is a word which was frequently associated with the enemies of Egypt, through using this word the Kushites were shown to be potential sources of disorder and destruction to the Egyptian state.

In the letter itself, Ramesses II was specifically identified as having personally ordered the well's construction, a probable fiction which served to boost the supposed influence and omnipotence of the Egyptian king. Ramesses II was also informed by his viceroy that his subject peoples had been filled with joy by the construction of the well ('the land of Akuyta'). Why it should have pleased Ramesses II to be told that he had done something which pleased non-Egyptians is not clear. Such statements were not out of place in the Egyptian context, however, with several texts referring either to the happiness of non-Egyptians (see 'praise for Memphis', Chapter 3) or to the kindness of the king towards non-Egyptians (see letter below). They served to emphasise the justice of Egyptian rule, that it was of benefit to Egyptians and non-Egyptians, as well as demonstrating that the king's power extended over both Egyptian and non-Egyptian alike. They were all his subjects, and so could be treated in the same way (Baines 1999d, 12), whether with condescension, cruelty or humanity.

These three letters display a clarity of thought and expression regarding the power of the king, the administration of Kush, and the division of the world into Egyptian/non-Egyptian across a time-span of at least 200 years. As letters which were incorporated into monumental witnesses of the Egyptian presence in Nubia, they were not vehicles for any discussion or questioning of this apparently fixed viewpoint. It was accepted, however, that non-Egyptians necessarily had to be incorporated into the Egyptian world.

Sources of instability

That non-Egyptians were an essential aspect to the maintenance of Egyptian power received recognition in letters derived from the king or his immediate circle, which differentiated between non-Egyptians. Even in times of supposedly strong central government, the king freely acknowledged the use of non-Egyptians in the upkeep of Egyptian boundary zones, and this was a regular concern addressed in letters. Many of these letters were preserved as copies on papyri (especially in the manuals discussed above). For example, Seti II wrote to one of his deputies reprimanding him for withdrawing the 'Tjukten-Libyans of the Oasis Land' from their job of patrolling the area (P.Anastasi IV; Gardiner 1937, 46-7, Caminos 1954, 176-81; Wente 1990, 35, no. 32; lines 10,8 - 11,8).

During the Late Ramesside period, when Egypt was more and more frequently successfully raided by non-Egyptians, the king wrote to non-Egyptians thanking them for their assistance in repelling other groups of non-Egyptians. This is seen in a letter of Ramesses IX, written to a group of Nubians protecting Egypt against the Bedouin (Kitchen 1983, 519-22; Wente 1990, 38-9 no. 38; P.Cairo C-D).

The initial address of the letter provides a link back to previous eras in Egyptian history, with well-known attributes of Nubians listed: out of the four groups of Nubians

addressed, three were described as 'feather wearing' and the fourth as 'bow carrying' (lines 39-42). These groups of people had been central in the protection of a mining expedition, specifically of the 'gold washing teams' (lines 42-4). Whilst congratulating the Nubians, Ramesses IX was also concerned to bring that victory back into the Egyptian domain, to attribute it to himself and Amun Re. This is seen in lines 45-9, where Ramesses IX stated that it had been his action which had overthrown the Shasu-Bedouin, and that it had been Amun-Re, the 'lord of every land' who had provided vital assistance. Thus the pretence that the king as well as his chief deity were all powerful was maintained.

Once this assertion had been made, Ramesses IX asked that the gods look kindly upon the Nubians in return for their victory, discussed matters of administration, and then restated the position of the Nubians with relation to the Egyptian state. He instructed the Nubians to continue defending the 'gold washers' against the Bedouin, but at the same time to refrain from attacking Egypt themselves: 'do not allow the Shasu-Bedouin to attack them [the gold washers], and do not come to attack within the land of Egypt' (lines 65-6). From one perspective, non-Egyptians were to be feared and kept outside Egypt 'proper' (line 66), but at the same time their skills were to be utilised and praised (lines 53-6). The purposes of the letter were three-fold; to congratulate the Nubians whilst informing them that their victory was due to the king and Amun-Re, to command them to continue their job whilst ordering them not to penetrate Egypt, and to make administrative arrangements.

This dependence on non-Egyptians to maintain security in Egypt's border zones was carefully argued so that it was presented in a format which did not deny the supremacy of Egypt: any success of non-Egyptians in serving the Egyptian state was due to the Egyptian state itself. Thus this letter of Ramesses IX manages to confirm the supposed power of Egypt, despite the obvious inconsistencies in its content.

Letters derived from the king, and those around him, had consistently acknowledged the utility of non-Egyptians, whilst at the same time associating them with negative qualities, adjectives such as *ḥs* (see above) describing non-Egyptians. In a way, the two concepts were not incompatible, as they were set against a background in which the content of the letters also continually reinforced the central values. A sliver of uncertainty, of inconsistency could perfectly easily be incorporated into an otherwise dogmatic letter. Thus it was perfectly possible for the Egyptian king to be thanked for bringing potentially disruptive non-Egyptians within the Egyptian state. As pointed out by Redford (1997a, 57), the reaction to non-Egyptians was not inflexible. He identified six variables upon which encounters with non-Egyptians could depend; for example, their 'social class' or the 'length of stay' in Egypt. It was not simply that all non-Egyptians were to be condemned.

For example, a letter to Seti II was found at Gurob. It was written by a woman, presumably of the core elite as she was able to address the king directly. She thanked him for sending her non-Egyptians to receive training (Gardiner 1940, 14-5; Wente 1990, 36, no. 34; P.Gurob III,1, rt.). Translators of the text have presumed that this training was to be in weaving, yet the text just notes that it was in 'this great task' (lines 2,3-2,4; see Kemp and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2001, 453). She noted how Seti II was continuing the custom of Ramesses II, and stated that such people were ideal: 'It is only the people who are like the people whom my Lord, life, prosperity, health, caused to be brought, who are able to be effective and who are able to receive my teaching as they are foreigners in the manner of those who were brought to us in the time of Usermare-Setepenre, life, prosperity, health [Ramesses II], the Great God, your good father' (lines 2,5-2,7).

Even in textual discourse such as the above letter, in which facts appear to be presented, it is not possible to simply take them at face value, to draw conclusions about the actual situation in Egypt. The textile industry in Egypt has long been assessed as an area in

which the majority of jobs were held by non-Egyptians, and Gurob in particular has been seen as a centre for non-Egyptian textile workers, doubtless leading to the interpretation of the above letter as referring to trainee weavers (see Kemp and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2001, 453). Yet the re-interpretation of pits in Gurob (at one stage interpreted as funeral pyres for non-Egyptians and then as rubbish pits) shows the care with which the evidence needs to be approached (see Meskell 2002, 37), especially given the latest re-interpretation (Politi 2001, 111) which has seen the pits re-identified as funeral pyres, specifically for Hittite women.

A parallel example is provided by Middle Kingdom pyramid town of Lahun. It has been hypothesised that the wool industry in Crete was so important that specialists would have been brought to Egypt, thus introducing Aegean motifs into the Egyptian artistic repertoire. This logical argument, based upon archaeological finds, is contradicted by textual evidence from Lahun, in which only Asiatics were mentioned as working in the textile industry. How to equate these contrasting pictures is complex: 'the problem of dislocation between the ancient reality and the texts becomes acute' (Fitton, Hughes and Quirke 1998, 134).

Both royal letters preserved in a monumental context, and royal letters which were preserved in copies on papyri, delineated a world in which the power of the king and his deities was absolute. This seems to have been the central requirement of royal letters, reiterated in both the content of a letter and in the formal addresses used at its beginning and end. Distinctions were also drawn, between Egyptians and non-Egyptians, between different categories of non-Egyptians, between different levels of officialdom, and between different locations which were defined in relation to those who lived there. Areas which were claimed as part of Egypt's territory, could nevertheless be occupied by undesirable non-Egyptians. The potential disorder threatened by non-Egyptians served to reinforce the vital role of the king, and to emphasise his power when he managed to keep such disorder at bay.

Outside the immediate royal context

The apparent ease with which the world could be defined, with the Egyptian (deities and rulers) state identified as a source of power and of protection against worrying outside elements, found its way into letters derived from outside the kingly circle as well. The majority of letters mentioned above would have been used in scribal manuals, as ideal types of letters from which scribes could learn the necessary styles, vocabulary and formats of letters.

One of the necessary themes for scribal exercises was formed by letters/reports in which the writer complained about being outside his usual environment, frequently outside Egypt. These complaints derived directly from the kingly perception of all that was in Egypt as representing the proper, ordered functioning of life. Thus it was reiterated to the scribe that being Egyptian involved enjoying a world in which all functioned properly, but at the same time it was necessary, in the service of the state, to work in places in which nothing functioned properly.

This is epitomised by what was probably intended as part of a letter (without opening address) surviving in several copies, in which an official described an environment beset by insects, unripening fruit and intense heat (P. Anastasi IV; Gardiner 1937, 48-9; Caminos 1954, 188-98). The writer described himself as being in the 'the beating of the land', understood by Caminos not as a real topographical name but as a term 'coined by the writer, as it befits the accursed place suspiciously well' (1954, 189). The verb *hwi* as well as meaning 'beat' can also mean 'roam/wander', thus forming with *t3* a reference to a nomadic location 'the roaming of the land'. This understanding of the writer's location also shows it to be the reverse of normal, settled life in the Nile Valley. The major problems of living in this location were caused by the wildlife,

which included a large number of dogs and jackals (500). These made the writer nervous of leaving his house; he stated that it was only possible to go out because of a royal scribe's jackal which protected him (lines 13,2 - 13,3).

Having to campaign outside Egypt was listed as one of the many reasons for which a scribe should be happy not to be a soldier. Texts urging the scribe to be happy with his lot by comparing it to that of those in other occupations were much copied (see Caminos 1954, 91). In one such copy, written as a letter, one scribe addressed another, listing the trials of a soldier (P.Anastasi III; Gardiner 1937, 26-7; Caminos 1954, 91-5). Foremost amongst these trials, was the requirement to fight outside Egypt, specifically in the hills of Syria-Palestine (lines 5, 9). No mention was made of the inhabitants of such places, instead the misery of the place was put down to the duties of the soldier there. The prime reason for discontent was the long march to battle through the hill-country, in which the soldier became like a pack-animal, exhausted even before the onset of battle (lines 5,10-6,1).

That such letters do not represent the whole picture is suggested by a model letter, probably composed during the reign of Seti II (Gardiner 1911; Wente 1990, no. 129; P. Anastasi I). The survival of this text in ten ostraca as well as in papyri indicates its popularity (Gardiner 1911, 4). The letter purported to have been written to a scribe, and, as such, would have been copied out by potential scribes: 'it posed challenges to improve the quality of the student's mind' (Wente 1995, 2216), with as many difficult words as possible included within the text, so that the student had to learn how to use them. In great detail the writer listed the hardships encountered by a scribe accompanying military expeditions abroad (the above text failed to acknowledge that scribes had to leave Egypt as well, and thus to some extent had to share the fate of a soldier). The writer posed as someone of experience, pulling the leg of a naive youngster about to enter his profession.

Numerous reasons were cited for the military scribe's life being one of unrelenting physical difficulties. In particular the physical landscape of the non-Egyptian world, specifically its inhabitants, were identified as a source of potential fear. The labels and words used to describe non-Egyptians mimic those used in royal texts, feeding upon the familiar, thus creating a more credible scenario.

Descriptions of non-Egyptians were made as fearsome as possible. For example, the Shasu-Bedouin were caricatured, pictured as hiding behind bushes waiting to ambush the unaware Egyptian: 'the narrow path is dangerous as the Shasu-Bedouin are concealed beneath the bushes, some of them being of four or five cubits, their nose to foot, and have fierce faces' (lines 23,7 - 23, 8; Figure 11). The exaggeration implicit in this description built upon a known situation, whereby the disenfranchised, or nomadic populations, lived in the hill country on the fringes of the state (Yurco 1997, 30).

The implication of this text, was, that once the outside world, the world populated primarily by non-Egyptians, was encountered it became less threatening. It was only when someone had actually been there, and returned, that fears of the unknown could be faced and seen not to be so bad. The experienced person, having travelled to such areas, could then tease the inexperienced and exploit his/her fears. Only the unworldly student would have been alarmed by this text. Thus in another letter the action of the Egyptian king in allowing the Shasu-Bedouin to be temporary residents of Egypt (in the Delta area, to provide pasture for their flocks) was described as beneficent, not as a cause for fear (P.Anastasi VI; Gardiner 1937, 76-7; Caminos 1954, 293-6; in particular line 57).

Indeed, the daily reality for many in Egypt of interacting with, or at least noticing, non-Egyptians living and working in their midst (see Baines 1996b, 367), meant that they were frequently referred to in letters without any negative attributes. At the same time a person's country of origin appears to have bestowed the main form of reference for a

person. Such people were often living in Egypt as a source of labour, and, by the eighteenth dynasty were frequently termed *hm* in conjunction with their country of origin (Bakir 1952, 31).

How to understand *hm* (and the other terms used for slave/servant), whether to translate it as 'servant' or 'slave' is unresolved, although it clearly could mean both, depending on context. It could simply have had the more general meaning of 'employee' implying a degree of autonomy. Those identified as *hm* would also have included people lacking the personal freedom implied today in the word 'employee' (see Meskell 2002, 105-106). The differences between forms of slavery, and between slavery and serfdom, are now blurred and difficult to distinguish (Bakir 1952, 6; Meskell 2002, 105). Nuances in the use of the term *hm* do appear however, for example, Bakir hypothesised 'to emphasize the foreign origin of the slave perhaps indicates that there was a certain difference in the status, or treatment, of native and foreign slaves' (1952, 72).

In a letter written during the nineteenth dynasty, at some point during the reigns of Merenptah or Seti II, the issue of a missing labourer was addressed (Wolf 1930, 89-97; Wente 1990, 124-6; P.Bologna 1086; see also Gardiner 1948, 115). He was referred to first merely as a Syrian, then his full name, parentage and country of origin were given, and then the writer went back to referring to him solely as the Syrian. Early on in the letter it was made clear that he had been part of a cargo of non-Egyptian labourers. But at no point was a negative adjective associated with him.

The purpose of the letter was to relate certain administrative problems to a superior, a priest called Ramose of the temple of Thoth 'satisfied of heart' in Memphis, paramount of which was the missing Syrian (Wolf 1930, section IV; Figure 12). The writer was a scribe called Bakenamon, who had been ordered by Ramose to find out what had happened to the slave: 'Furthermore, I have made enquiries into the Syrian of the

temple of Thoth, whom you wrote to me about and I have found that he was placed as a cultivator of the temple of Thoth under your authority in Year 3, month 2 of *šmw*, day 10, from among the *ḥmw* of the ships' cargoes which the overseer of the fortresses had brought back' (lines 9-10). The Syrian's name, parentage and country of origin were then given: 'To cause that you know his name; the Syrian Nekedy, son of Seretja, whose mother is Kedy of the land of Aradus, a *ḥm* of the ship's cargo of this temple in the ship captain Kel's boat' (lines 11-12).

When the country of origin of a non-Egyptian was not mentioned, that person could be referred to by more general designations of foreigner, such as *ꜥ / ʒꜥ* (*ʒꜥ* is the Late Egyptian version of *ꜥ* - see Bell 1976, 1-24). This word was sometimes written with the throwstick determinative, typically associated with foreign countries. Several translations of *ʒꜥ* have been suggested, for example, 'foreign mercenary troops', 'interpreters', and 'Nubians' without necessarily being used as a general term for foreigners (Goedicke 1966; Bell 1976, 90-2).

References to *ʒꜥ* were made in several of the Late Ramesside Letters, written by those living within the enclosure wall of Medinet Habu, in contexts which were often not made explicit. For example, at the end of a letter probably addressed to Dhutmose, the writer warned the recipient to 'keep an eye on the matter of the foreigner' (Cerny 1939, 65, no. 44; Wente 1967, 77-8, no. 44; Janssen 1991, plate 55; P.Bournemouth, line 12). In another letter, from Dhutmose to Butehamon, which covered many issues, Dhutmose complained that one of the letters sent to him had not reached him (Cerny 1939, 17-21, no.9; Wente 1967, 37-42, no. 9; Janssen 1991, plates 37-8; P.Brit.Mus. 10326, Figures 14-19). This was supposed to have been delivered by an *ʒꜥ*. 'Now as for you having said about the matter of the letters, about which you said: "Have they

reached you?" They have reached me except for the letter which you gave to the foreigner Seti, the brother of the fisherman Panefermneb' (lines 8-10). Despite the failure of Seti to deliver a letter, a negative adjective was not linked to him, although this may merely have been dictated by a desire to be concise.

Further blurring of the world of opposites, of Egyptian versus non-Egyptian, is revealed by the apparent possibility of a non-Egyptian becoming an Egyptian. Labelling someone after their country of origin, or simply as ʒ^ꜥ, need not have had a permanency. This is suggested in a further Late Ramesside letter, the remaining part of which was a list of men who had been appointed to cultivate new land (Cerny 1939, 53, no. 33; Wente 1967, 69, no. 33; Janssen 1991, plate 86; P.Bibl.Nat.199 II; Figure 13). Amongst them was a man who was called 'the son of ʒ^ꜥ-mr, of the new land of *pr-dʒdʒ*, who was [wn] a foreigner [ʒ^ꜥ]' (line 4). The word *wn* appears to have been used in its role as an indicator of past time (Cerny and Groll 1993, 296-7; also translated as such by Wente 1967, 69).

If this is so, then this letter shows it was possible to abandon the status of foreigner - here the man's foreign-ness was assigned to the past. Indeed, the state itself may have played a central role in ensuring the assimilation of non-Egyptians, of their acceptance of Egyptian culture, as illustrated by the education of the sons of non-Egyptian rulers in the Egyptian palace (see Leblanc 1999). A stela of Ramesses III from western Thebes records that he tried to force a group of non-Egyptians, the Meshwesh, to abandon their language and to speak Egyptian instead (Bruyère 1930, 34-7; Bakir 1952, 112). In the *Instruction of Any*, a text known to the Deir el Medina community (see above), the son was encouraged to stick to his father's instructions by being informed that even non-Egyptians can learn Egyptian.

Within Egypt, linguistic preferences formed an important aspect to self-definition, and the ability of the written word to ignore linguistic variation may point to a concerted attempt on the part of the state to maintain linguistic integrity (see above; Roccatti 1980, 80). The ancient Egyptian language may have played an important role in maintaining an Egyptian identity, and a recognisably Egyptian way of conducting life through the millennia (Roccatti 1980, 84). This was despite not infrequent encounters with other languages (and more frequent ones with other dialects of Egyptian) alongside an in-depth knowledge of some non-Egyptian languages.

Such a knowledge was clearly necessary given Egypt's international setting. A cuneiform tablet (Smith and Gadd 1925, 230-1), found at house O.49.23 in Amarna during Peet's excavations there, may have been an exercise written by a non-Egyptian trying to learn Egyptian (although it could also have been written by an Egyptian who knew phonetic cuneiform but was trying to learn how to write cuneiform correctly). It consisted of numerals written in Egyptian on the left with cuneiform numbers on the right (Smith and Gadd 1925, 231-8). Furthermore, the issue of how people ended up speaking different languages was addressed in the New Kingdom, and was attributed to the actions of the divine world (Sauneron 1960, 32-3). The first mention of the separation of languages was in the Hymn to the Aten, from the Amarna period (Sauneron 1960, 32).

The association of non-Egyptians with foreign languages was thus a well-known theme, which could also appear in scribal exercises. One such exercise addressed the frequent problem of a lazy scribe. In this letter, (P.Sallier I; Gardiner 1937, 85; Caminos 1954, 319-21), an official informed his scribe that he had not been exerting himself as he should, despite various punishments. The scribe's ability to deflect and ignore any punishment led his superior to compare him to an ass that had been beaten or to a Nubian.

The Nubian was described as speaking a foreign language understood by Caminos (1954, 320) as ‘gibbering’: ‘You are as a Nubian, speaking a foreign language [ḥꜥ], who has been brought in with the tribute’ (line 8, 1). The use of ḥꜥ here appears to be in its original meaning: ‘the designation ḥꜥ is quite general, meaning properly “speaking in a foreign language”’ (Gardiner 1941, 25). This image of a non-Egyptian, being brought to Egypt as an item of tribute, and speaking in a foreign language was thus as accessible a motif as that of a beaten ass, and to be compared to either could be equally insulting. The two aspects of the Nubian, as tribute and as someone who spoke a foreign language, further emphasised his lowly status. The letter ended with a warning that the scribe would be brought under control in the end.

Several groups of non-Egyptians were regularly mentioned in letters, whose origins were outside Egypt, but whose long-term roles within Egypt came to mean that their non-Egyptian label stood for their occupation as well (Redford 1997a, 60-2). People who had never experienced a country other than Egypt, could still be referred to by the name of their supposed ancestors’ original geographical location. These groups of people included the Medjay (Gauthier 1926, 66), who had originally been associated with Nubia, but who were now policemen: ‘by the New Kingdom, the term *mꜥḏꜣyw* had developed a purely vocational meaning of “policeman, desert ranger”, and the remaining ethnic connotations were dropped altogether’ (McDowell 1990, 51-2). Further groups included the Meshwesh, a group of people from the Western desert (Richardson 1999, 149), and the Sherden, who were one of the ‘Sea Peoples’ used for defending Egypt (Leahy 1995, 228; Warburton 2001, 82, 91-8). Despite long historical inscriptions detailing conquests over such groups of people, they became an integral part of New Kingdom Egypt.

For the Late Ramesside community at Medinet Habu, there was the dual position that such people could be identified as a threat to the inhabitants whilst at the same time

other allegedly non-Egyptians were central to the functioning of the community. Warnings were given that the Meshwesh were approaching Thebes, and work on the royal tombs ceased because of the hostile presence of the Meshwesh (see Haring 1992, 73-4; Sweeney 2001, 78-9). Peden (2000, 288) has suggested that the decline of graffiti in western Thebes in late 20th/early 21st dynasty may have been due to the Meshwesh who made 'it dangerous to go for desert strolls'. The fear and disorder which was allegedly caused by the Meshwesh could be discarded once the Meshwesh accepted some degree of authority, thus enabling them to be accorded rations (Haring 1992, 78).

The Medjay and the Sherden were frequently referred to in texts from Deir el Medina, where there may have been as many as sixty Medjay working in western Thebes (Cerny 1973, 262). The separateness of the Medjay from the community of workmen as a whole was emphasised by the fact that they did not receive rations with the workmen, and that they appear not to have lived in the Deir el Medina settlement, but on the floodplain near Medinet Habu as indicated by the town register, P.BM 10068 (Cerny 1973, 280-1; McDowell 1990, 54; Meskell 2000, 267).

Both the Medjay and the Sherden were used in the delivery of letters between people separated by a distance. A negative attribute was not a necessary part of referring to such people. Someone called the 'Medjay Hadnakht' delivered letters between Butehamon, Dhutmose and Piankh, as did the 'Sherden Hori'. In Late Ramesside letter no. 9 (Cerny 1939, 17-21, no.9; Wente 1967, 37-42, no. 9; Janssen 1991, plates 37-8; P.Brit.Mus. 10326; see above; Figures 14-19) Dhutmose gave Butehamon instructions about three people, all of whom were named, and two were also labelled as 'Medjay' and the third as a 'Sherden': 'Moreover, do not be neglectful of the Medjay Kas, and give to him the bread rations and see to it that he weaves the fabrics' (line vs.6) and 'send the Medjay Hadnakht, see to it that he is sent to me quickly, and do not allow him to delay. [I] have written to you for him already through the Sherden Hori' (lines vs.

7-8). These three people frequently performed tasks on behalf of Piankh, Dhutmose and Butehamon. For example, in Late Ramesside letter no. 16 (Cerny 1939, 31-3, no. 16; Wente 1967, 49-51, no. 16; Janssen 1991, plates 92-3; P.Turin 1971; Figures 20-3; see below). Butehamon replied to Dhutmose, telling him that the Medjay Kas had been getting on with his work. He also stated that the Medjay Hadnakht had been entrusted with the delivery of the letter (line vs.11). Similarly in Late Ramesside letter no. 50 (Cerny 1939, 71-4, no.50; Wente 1967, 83-5, no.50; Janssen 1991, plates 103-104; P.Turin 2026; see below), Dhutmose wrote to Butehamon, mentioning the Sherden Hori as the person who had delivered copper spears to Dhutmose in Nubia (lines 16-7), and Dhutmose also complained that Butehamon had not replied about 'the matter of the Medjay Kasy' (lines 21-2).

One letter in particular illuminates the process of the delivery of letters in which these supposedly non-Egyptian individuals were involved (Cerny 1939, 44-8, no. 28; Wente 1967, 59-65, no. 28; Janssen 1991, plates 39-40; P.Brit.Mus. 10375). This was written by Butehamon to Piankh (in Nubia), who described the delivery of Piankh's letter, and the means by which its contents were made public: 'We have paid attention to all the matters which our lord wrote to us about. As for this letter having been sent to us through the hand of Hori, the Sherden, this messenger of our lord, the scribe Butehamon ferried across and received it from him in the first month of *šmw*, [day] 18' (lines 10-12). When the letter reached Butehamon, he then read it out to the workmen of the Necropolis, and the letter was concluded by noting that it was being sent to Piankh through the Medjay Hadnakht (line vs 15).

Unlike the Kushites who were termed 'vile', the Medjay and the Sherden were referred to in much the same way as other Egyptians. In contrast to the Kushites, the non-Egyptian origin of the Medjay had long been superseded. Criticism of the Medjay was thus not applied unilaterally, instead was often inspired by their inability to fulfill their roles adequately. For example, when a chief of the Medjay had failed to carry out his

duties as a policeman, then he was addressed in a derogatory manner (P.Anastasi V; Gardiner 1937, 70-1; Caminos 1954, 269-73). He was reproved solely on the basis of his administrative failings, and was also reminded of his position, his relatively low status: 'you are a son of the subordinates; you are not a nobleman' (line 26, 6).

The king's proud delineation of the world, seen in his letters, was to a certain extent reflected in other letters of the literate across a wide timespan. The terms used in the king's letters to refer to those regarded as from outside Egypt were taken up by other literate people in Egypt. Thus a non-Egyptian could be referred to within a letter about a variety of issues as a matter of course, without any condemnatory comments, as could subject Egyptians. These were themselves possibilities opened up by the king himself, with the acknowledgement in his letters of the utility of non-Egyptians, and their necessity to the functioning of the ordered, Egyptian world. When a non-Egyptian failed in an allotted task, then a more derogatory tone could enter a letter. The same motifs as seen in the king's letters could be taken up in a non-royal letter, but reinterpreted to expose the lack of basis for a negative view of the outside world.

The apex of the ordered world

The establishment of hierarchy

The self-image of the king as the centre of the ordered world alongside his deities was proudly proclaimed in letters derived from him. This self-assured claim to greatness and omnipotence was also reflected in letters derived from non-royal contexts, in which letter-writers paid homage to the Egyptian deities and to the king. The dual homage was both appropriate and necessary: 'the political system of pharaonic kingship is a kind of religion quite in the same way as Egyptian religion is a form of political organization' (Assmann 1989, 56). The hierarchy of Egyptian society (see Baines 1990), in which 'status is one of the most significant features' (Sweeney 2001, 233),

was, for the most part, reflected in the letters which seem to abide by intricate 'rules' of social decorum.

Formalised statements confirming the respect due to the king and/or the gods did not only frame letters addressed to the king or his immediate circle, but also appeared in letters written solely for a friend or an acquaintance. Merely listing the titulary of the king at the beginning of a letter to him, conveyed the writer's supposed acceptance of the king's power (see for example, Daressy 1927, 174-5; Wente 1990, no. 33; O.Cairo JE 72467). How meaningful the thought processes behind such statements were, is however uncertain. Letters actually addressed to the king could be particularly florid in their praising of him, and this could dominate the content of a letter as a whole. Two letters, which were written to inform the king that all was in order in his establishments, primarily focused on expressing admiration for the king and his omnipotence.

The first was written to Amenhotep IV by an official in Memphis. The actual news of the letter, that Memphis was thriving, was introduced by formal phrases exalting the power of the king (Sandman 1938, 147-8, no. CXLIV; Wente 1990, 28, no. 17; P.Gurob 1.1 and 1.2). These statements reflected the king's view of what his role was; he had to maintain power within his domain, with the help of the gods. For example, the writer asked that Ptah help Amenhotep IV exert power over the southerners, and to make lands fearful (Sandman 1938, 147, lines 6-7). Only at the end of the letter was the well-being of Memphis conveyed.

An even more emphatic exultation of the king's power was made in a letter initially written to Merenptah (Gardiner 1937, 15-6, no. 6; Caminos 1954, 48-50, no. 6; Wente 1990, 34-5, no. 31; P.Anastasi II 5, 6). The style of this letter was so admired that it was later adapted to form a letter praising Seti II (Caminos 1954, 153, no. 9; P.Anastasi IV, 5, 6; Figure 24), and the letter reads more like a hymn of praise than an actual letter. Yet the origin of the text, or merely its alleged origin, was in a letter, as

the initial phrase reads 'this is a letter to provide information for the king at the palace, life, prosperity, health, "Beloved of Ma'at", the horizon where Re is' (lines 5,6-5,7). An almost dream-like atmosphere was created through the description of the king's power. For example, the writer compared Merenptah to Re: 'your rays enter into the cave, and no place is devoid of your beauty; you are told the condition of every land while you are resting in your palace' (line 6,1).

The expression of discontent

Such whole-hearted acceptance of the king did not exclude the possibility of writing to him with complaints and criticism. This is well attested by the Amarna letters, written to Amenhotep III and Akhenaten by rulers from outside Egypt (see Cohen and Westbrook 2000; Higginbotham 2000, 41-2). These were a set of approximately 300 clay tablets, found in Amarna in 1887, on which the letters (mostly in Akkadian, the international language of the time, see Baines 1999b, 228) of near eastern rulers were preserved. They had been kept together, in an archive, and demonstrate the ability of the literate in Egypt to work in other languages and scripts (Giles 1997, 39).

The king was continually appealed to for help, hence Liverani's (1973, 184) topos of the 'righteous sufferer' in the Amarna letters. Those who wrote to Amenhotep III and Akhenaten emphasised and played upon their supposed wretched condition. For example, Ribaddi of Gubla frequently wrote to the king; each time his condition, and that of his territories was alleged to be worse than before, with more and more devastating attacks from the 'Habiru' and apparently no support from the king. He greeted the king as a suppliant, 'at the feet of my lord, of my sun, seven times and seven I fall down' (EA 68, translation by Knapp 1997, 387), but was also able to fall into bitter reproaches to the king for his lack of assistance. For example, in EA 126 (translation by Knapp 1997, 405) he wrote that 'but see I wrote to my lord about troops, but garrison troops were not sent and nothing whatsoever was given [to] me'.

As in the Amarna letters, where the writers complained that their letters were not being read, or their problems addressed, so too could Egyptians reproach their king, and his circle. For one individual, Meryiotef, who lived during the reign of Ramesses II, not having his letters replied to was a particular problem. The letter was written in Lower Egypt, from the royal court (Janssen 1960, 33). Meryiotef wrote to Prince Ramesses-Maatptah, beginning the letter with the required formal phrases, assuring the prince that he was asking the gods to grant the prince long life and health (Bakir 1970, plates 15-6, XXI; Janssen 1960; Wente 1990, no. 23; P.Leiden I 367). The actual subject of the letter was limited to a few short remarks, Meryiotef curtly stating that not one of his previous letters had been replied to.

Letters appear to have been one method for Egyptians to attempt to access officials at a higher level than themselves, to voice dissatisfaction. As discussed above, the presence of potential unrest and dissatisfaction with the ruling powers is testified by the Turin strike papyrus, and internal divisions are revealed by the struggles for power seen in the reign of Hatshepsut. In contrast, protestations in letters were surrounded by phrases expressing acceptance of the ruling powers. In such a context, protest could be made without threat of retribution.

Perhaps this was because written complaints represented no threat to the ruling powers; they could be contained and dealt with. Or merely ignored if necessary. In the context of understanding the Turin Strike papyri (from the reign of Ramesses III), Edgerton chose to emphasise that, despite these manifestations of non-co-operation with the ruling powers, 'Pharaonic Egypt was a totalitarian state, and the Pharaoh was its dictator' (1951, 145). Even if this was the case (and using such terms loaded with twentieth century connotations is clearly problematic) that did not mean that every individual was robbed of their identity, pushed into an unquestioning acceptance of all that emanated from the ruling powers (see Wilson 1960, 163).

This is demonstrated by a study of letters of complaint written in Stalinist Russia (with which Edgerton was probably drawing an indirect comparison in the above statement). Some of the Soviet officials received a huge quantity of such letters; for example more than 1.5 million letters were written to one government official in a twelve year period (Fitzpatrick 1999, 175). Despite the fact that the majority of the letters were dealing with the injustices caused by the regime, it was nonetheless an accepted form of action. Denouncing local officials to central government was especially encouraged, but it was also possible to complain about the central government (Fitzpatrick 1999, 177). That this apparently paradoxical situation existed has been explained in terms of the desire of the regime to appear as the legitimate righter of wrongs, and for individual officials, as well as Stalin, to appear as the 'benevolent father' (Fitzpatrick 1999, 176).

The key to understanding such comparable expressions of discontent in New Kingdom Egypt is in how far the state chose to meet the demands made upon them. The frequency with which complaints were written suggest that it was not a totally pointless exercise: 'complaints are frequently followed by explicit instructions for remedying the wrong or sorting out the problem. It seems, therefore, that people write letters of complaint in order to ensure that their wrongs are redressed and their problems solved, rather than merely to vent their indignation' (Sweeney 2001, 192). And, in fitting with the highly structured nature of Egyptian society, people phrased their complaints in accordance with who they were approaching. It was only towards those of equivalent, or almost equivalent, status to themselves that complaints were phrased with exasperation (see Sweeney 2001, 227). Such was the acceptability of justified complaints that the Middle Kingdom *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* was composed around an individual's struggle for justice against an unjust official (Parkinson 1991; 1998, 54). The king was the source of justice, providing a contrast to his officials: once more there was a distinction between a corrupt periphery and just centre (Parkinson 1998, 77).

A major cause for discontent was the imposition of what were felt to be unacceptably high taxes. The collection of taxes would often have been one of the central means by which the authority of the state was felt across the country as a whole, and could result in real hardship, much of which is unrecorded. The complaints of the literate about high taxation, when they would presumably have been the very people most able to meet taxation demands, present only a very partial picture of the situation.

One such letter was written at the very end of the twentieth dynasty by the overseer of Elephantine to an individual thought to have been the 'Chief Taxing master' (Gardiner 1951). The actual formal phrases of greeting were limited to the first five lines of the text, in which expressions of goodwill towards the official and the king were made (Gardiner 1951; P.Valençay no 1). Baines (2001, 18-20) has argued that this letter was between two officials who would have known each other, hence the opening formulae need not be understood as hypocritical, but as a necessary aspect to a personal letter (Baines 2001, 20). After these expressions of goodwill towards the recipient, the writer immediately stated his concern. The rest of the letter was a succinct description of the complaint, unembellished by any further phrases of respect (recto line 6 - verso line 11). The writer had had his levels of tax unfairly set by an individual collecting tax for the 'House of the Chantress of Amun'; he had been alleged to have cultivated land which he hadn't, and had had the level of tax set too high on a piece of land which had had a very low yield due to the level of the Nile. As well as being free from any extra phrases of respect, this section of the letter was also free from any expressions of anger or frustration (Sweeney 2001, 229-30).

Letters complaining about the imposition of taxes were such a usual part of life for some in the New Kingdom, that they were one of the types of texts copied by scribes as exercises. Indeed, one of the letters copied onto P.Bologna 1094 (probably from Memphis - Gardiner 1937, 6-7; Caminos 1954, 17-20) followed the same format as the

above letter, with the same protestations that tax was being extorted upon items which the writer (a priest) did not have. This letter, however, was not addressed to the official in charge of tax, but instead commanded the recipient to collect the evidence to prove the writer's case and then present it to the vizier.

The literate in Deir el Medina also voiced their complaints in carefully worded letters to their superiors, as well as resorting to other forms of more 'direct action'. This is seen in two letters, both of the nineteenth dynasty, the first from the scribe Neferhotep and the second from Kenhikhopeshef. Both the letters were addressed to the vizier. The first letter survives on an ostrakon, found at Deir el Medina, and so would either have been a copy of the letter which was sent, or a draught version of it (Wente 1961, 253). In this text, Neferhotep wrote to the vizier To (O. 16991, Wente 1961, plates VII-VIII, 255-7), commencing his letter with all necessary introductory phrases including a long list of deities (such as 'Amenophis who lives in the middle of the west side') to whom he has been praying everyday, asking that the king remain in power. Neferhotep further depicted himself as an upstanding Egyptian through informing the vizier that he had been working properly and well. Then, after these reassuring sections, Neferhotep wrote that the community was suffering intensely from poverty and urgently needed help. For example, in lines 10-2, Neferhotep asked that 'May our lord cause that we may live; indeed we are dying, we are not living'.

Kenhikhopeshef, as one of the leading officials of the Deir el Medina community during the nineteenth dynasty, was an appropriate figure from the community to complain to the vizier in writing. The vizier, Panehsy, has been identified as a 'well-known personage who appears to have enjoyed the special favour of the Pharaoh Menepthah' (Gardiner 1935, 24). As such, Kenhikhopeshef phrased his letter with great care (Gardiner 1935, 24-6, C, plates 11-2 *α*; Wente 1990, 48-9, no. 52; P. Chester Beatty III, vs 4-5). The first half of the letter was an eloquent description of how all was well

in Thebes, full of assurances that the workmen of Deir el Medina were working hard, and this section concluded with a passage complimenting Panehsy (lines 4:1-4:8).

Only after this highly complimentary and reassuring section, did Kenhikhopshef voice his discontent. He listed his complaints, which concerned the failure of the state to keep the workmen supplied with their tools with which to build the royal tombs. For example, the workmen needed spikes, gypsum and baskets (lines 4:9-4:12). This lack of attention to the community's needs was attributed by Kenhikhopshef to the distance between Thebes and the central government, specifically the king (line 4:14).

Similar complaints could be addressed to Kenhikhopeshef by his own subordinates (Kitchen 1980, 534-5, A.30; Wente 1990, 149, no. 204; O DM 303; see also Sweeney 2001, 220-1). Thus the 'draftsman Prehotep' wrote to Kenhikhopeshef, with a series of complaints. He addressed Kenhikhopeshef as his 'superior' (*hry* - compare with Piankh's complaints about the king, see below), wished him life, prosperity and health, but offered no further phrases of goodwill. Instead he complained that Kenhikhopeshef was always demanding that he carried out work, but overlooked him when it came to rations of beer. To emphasise his unhappy situation, Prehotep accused Kenhikhopeshef of treating him, a subordinate, like an animal: 'I am like a donkey to you' (line 8). The purpose of the letter was summarised in a postscript, which concluded: 'I am seeking to fill my stomach through writing to you'.

Despite being letters of complaints, Kenhikhopshef and Prehotep maintained the hierarchy of Egyptian society by expressing discontent within a framework of acceptance. That which was so proudly claimed by kings throughout the New Kingdom, namely the centrality of the king to life in Egypt, was also acknowledged in letters written by his subjects. He was the apex of the Egyptian world, and a whole hierarchy of officials worked under him, to whom as much respect needed to be shown. Statements almost overwhelming in their adoration of the king, his deities, and

his deputies, did not mean that such individuals could not be criticised: 'the language of sycophantic subservience, which we find in most sources from ancient Egypt, was the price to be paid for the survival of a popular culture of disrespect' (Kemp 2001, 129). At the same time, the king was identified as the ultimate source of justice, as someone who could rectify problems caused by those lower down in the echelons of government (see Kenhikhopeshef's letter above).

Differentiation within the Egyptian world

Being a literate inhabitant of Egypt did not simply involve expressing loyalty to the king, the gods and his officials, focusing upon the state as a generator of identity and social cohesion, and uniting in a disdain for the outside world. Alongside such national aspirations, ran a far more locally based set of identities, whereby the familiar locale was all-important. The physical landscape of Egypt itself created a number of boundaries: the opposition between the cultivation and the desert; between the green fertile flat land and the craggy, stony desert mountains; between the Delta and the Nile Valley; between the oasis areas and the surrounding desert; the shores of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean contrasting with the Nile (Figure 2). Such contrasts were implicitly acknowledged in the titulary of the king, which commemorated the unification of Egypt, and in the terms, *kmt* ('the black land', the floodplain) and *dšrt* ('the red land', the desert). The confusion induced by being in an unfamiliar part of Egypt was recognised; in the Middle Kingdom *Tale of Sinuhe*: Sinuhe's state of mind when leaving Egypt was compared to that of a Delta man in Elephantine. The identification of people from different areas within Egypt, was matched by the use of the term *rhyt* for non-elite Egyptians and foreigners - both were potentially disruptive (Pavlova 1999, 103-104; contrast Baines 1996b, 367; see above).

Despite the unity in the styles of monumental architecture up and down Egypt, there were also contrasts in the built environment, with sites unique in the intensity of their monumental architecture, such as the pyramid fields or Thebes. There may also have been contrasts in the lifestyles of the inhabitants of the different areas, for example, in their choices of personal adornment, dress and in culinary tastes. A suggestion of this differentiation is given in the model letter, P.Anastasi I, mentioned above, in which a reference was made to an Upper Egyptian linen shirt (Gardiner 1911, 27). Likewise, the power structure in Egypt was not solely dictated by the centre. A hierarchy of local officials would have carried out the business of state in varying ways resulting in very different experiences for residents in different locations of Egypt. This relationship between local and central power has been explored (see Eyre 2000), with an emphasis upon the delegation of power (Eyre 2000, 35).

Disdain for the non-familiar

Travel itself was not something carried out for pleasure, but occurred instead when the state required it, for reasons of labour, or for military purposes, or to escape the state (Volokhine 1998, 54). The reactions of those who had to leave their home environment are only preserved by those with some level of literacy. Linguistically, any regionalism was staunchly ignored by the written language (see above), yet letter writers did not avoid mentioning feelings of despair when away from home, exposing disquiet even when still within Egypt.

This was so entrenched in the condition of being an Egyptian, that it found literary form in a Late Egyptian text, discovered at el Hiba in a pot which also contained the *Tale of Wenamun* and the best extant copy of the onomasticon of Amenemopet (P. Pushkin 127; Caminos 1977, 1). This text in a copy of about 1000 BCE, known either as the *Tale of Woe* or as the *Letter of Wermi*, should perhaps be dated to the 21st dynasty in origin as with the *Tale of Wenaumun*, although Caminos had thought it could have

originated in the 19th dynasty (Camino 1977, 1, 78; Baines 1999b). It was written in the first person, in the form of a letter, and contains within it all the necessary New Kingdom letter formulae (Camino 1977, 76).

The actual text was composed as a work of fiction, employing several devices to make it seem more realistic (for example, the text was alleged to be a copy of Wermai's original letter - Camino 1977, 78). Camino chose to distinguish it from other New Kingdom texts, in particular model letters (also never intended to be sent), because it was written as a 'narrative work of fiction' and was not an 'imaginary letter' (1977, 78-9, ff.). As a literary device, Camino noted that it was, 'in so far as our evidence goes, without parallel in Egypt and even in the entire Near East' (1977, 79).

Wermai listed his title at the beginning of the text (column 1, line 1): he was *lt-ntr* ('god's father') in the temple of '*lwnw*' (Heliopolis), and was writing to the royal scribe Usima're'nakhte (column 1, line 2). Approximately the first quarter of the text is concerned with supplying all the formulaic expressions of goodwill towards the recipient (column 1, line 1 - column 2, line 4; Camino 1977, 79). Once the actual purpose of the text was reached, Wermai lost no time in describing graphically his unhappy fate (which was through no fault of his own) but at the same time did not provide any specific details (see Camino 1977, 76).

As soon as he began this section of the text, Wermai stated the cause of his problems: he had been removed from his job, had lost his possessions and had been forced to leave his home ('I was cast out from my city', column 2, line 5). This personal catastrophe was emphasised through setting it against the background of general chaos in Egypt 'when the land was immersed in the flames of war, in the south, the north, the west and the east' (column 2, line 11).

Crucial to the text is Wermai's reaction, both on finding his home environment filled with enemies, and on having to leave his home. Forced to wander across Egypt (and on occasion outside its borders) as an exile (see Caminos 1977, plate 1 for a map of Wermai's journeys), looking for a new home, he found himself a stranger (see Caminos 1977, 77; compare Chapter 4). This was a condition he despised: 'I was always in a city which was not mine or I was in a town which I did not know as I was in the condition of being a stranger (*hpp*)' (column 3, line 7). It was irrelevant that Wermai was mainly wandering within Egypt's borders: what mattered to him was being in the city he knew, and in which he was known. Thus being outside his home locality was bound to be painful, and he vividly described the loneliness that accompanied his exile (column 3, line 9 - column 3, line 13).

The actual place in which he settled, presumed by Caminos to have been a rural location within Egypt (1977, 80), was one beset by troubles, the 'common hard lot of scores of country places throughout Egypt' (Caminos 1977, 80). Yet it was a contrast to Wermai's previous life in his home; now he was beset by hunger, living amongst a starving population wronged by the overlord/landowner. False corn-measures were used to rob the populace of their wages, and taxation was so high that no-one, including Wermai, was able to pay it on time. The desperation of the situation was such that 'the Nile has dried up (ceased) and their land is in darkness' (column 4, line 4). Yet, throughout it all, Wermai maintained his hope that the recipient of the letter would be able to inform a nameless individual (thought by Caminos to be the king - 1977, 77, 79-80) of his plight, enabling him to receive assistance.

The whole text serves as an eloquent expression of the unhappiness and desperation which ensued the forced removal of an individual from the home surroundings, even when still within Egypt's borders. His experience undermined his very sense of Egyptian-ness: 'as the high-priest of a central cult-place, he is driven out to the periphery of an oasis to find out that the concepts of *m³c.t* and with it the collective

identity have become hollow and worthless and are substituted by the law of the strongest' (Moers 1999, 56). The *Letter of Wermai*, despite being a carefully constructed literary text, seems nevertheless to have drawn upon themes not distant from actual Egyptian experience as expressed in 'real' letters.

The main non-literary source for such feelings are a series of letters written between Dhutmose and Butehamon, when Dhutmose was forced to be away from Medinet Habu on official duty (Valbelle 1990, 187). While he was away he kept in touch with Butehamon, constantly checking that all was well in Thebes. The same geographical term, *l3̄r*, was used by Dhutmose to describe areas within Egypt, and in Nubia, but distant from Thebes, demonstrating a monolithic view of the world beyond home. *l3̄r* was not a real place, but instead was a term used for anywhere thought to be unpleasant (Wente 1967, 19). 'Hellhole' has been suggested as an equivalent term in English (Wente 1967, 19). Wente also suggested (1967, 19) that the word was a compound of *r* ('out from') and the particle *l3̄* ('indeed'): 'indeed to get out'. Alternatively, the term may have been used to draw a contrast to the wondrous land of *l3̄* in the *Tale of Sinuhe* (Blackman 1932, 23, B 81; see in Parkinson 1998, 16, 51), as there may have been a phonetic similarity between the two words. Dhutmose's *l3̄r* was the direct opposite to the paradisaical location of Sinuhe's tale.

Dhutmose travelled both to Nubia and north of Thebes, and did not seem to enjoy either destination. His letters expressed a continual anxiety over matters in Thebes, how everyone was in his absence, as well as frequent appeals that Butehamon pray to the Theban deities on his behalf. Such letters were constructed with elaborate phrases, their formality suggesting that expressions of homesickness were an expected part of being away from home. Yet in the same letters Dhutmose was able to discuss non-Egyptians residing in Thebes with equanimity.

Long lists of deities were invoked at the beginning of Dhutmose's letters. In Late Ramesside letter no. 9 (Cerny 1939, 17-21, no.9; Wente 1967, 37-42, no. 9; Janssen 1991, plates 37-8; P.Brit.Mus.10326; Figures 14-19; see above), Dhutmose first greeted Butehamon, listing his titles, then greeted the deities of Thebes (lines 1-3), and finally appealed to the deities local to him, asking that 'Horus of Kuban, Horus of Aniba, and Atum, lord of the earth' grant Butehamon a long life (lines 3-4). Straight after this, Dhutmose made clear his wish to be back in Thebes, also asking his local deities that they 'cause that Amun of the thrones of the two lands, my good lord, may bring me [back] alive - so that I may fill my embrace with you - [from] *llḥr*, where I am abandoned [*ḥḥ*] in this distant land' (Nubia - lines 4-5).

Having very explicitly expressed his distaste for his present situation, Dhutmose was then able to discuss the actual business of the letter. This included instructing a coppersmith to make spears, and training a foal. Yet he was not able to concentrate totally on such matters, and in the midst of this section, made another appeal to Butehamon (lines 15-8): 'Tell Amun, joined-with-eternity, Amenophis, Nofretari, Meretseger, my mistress, and Amun, holy-of-place, to bring me back alive. Place me in the presence of Amun, joined-with-eternity, and Amenophis, and say to them, "You will bring him back alive", and tell Amun, lord of the thrones of the two lands, to save me'. Thus central to his anxiety was the thought that he might never see his home again, that he might die away from home whilst on a military mission.

A further factor contributing to Dhutmose's unease in being in *llḥr* (in this case also referring to Nubia), was that he was worried about his family, the people he had left behind in Thebes. He stated this explicitly in Late Ramesside letter no. 2 (Cerny 1939, 2-5, no. 2; Wente 1967, 20-1, no. 2; Janssen 1991, plates 95-6; P.Turin 1973). The familiar appeals that he should return safely begin the letter (lines 2-3), after which

Dhutmose asked after everyone at home. Once more he reminded Butehamon to make offerings to Amun of the thrones of the two lands on his behalf, to tell Amun 'to bring me back from *l3ꜣr* the place in which I am' and his physical well-being was affected by his absence from home; such was his unease that he was unable to sleep (lines vs 2-3). By providing such details, Dhutmose was able to add pathos to his situation, and to increase a sense of urgency for his return.

The trials of travelling within Egypt could be as great as those endured when in Nubia. Physical hardship was induced by being in an unfamiliar locale in Egypt as well as by being in Nubia. Thus when Dhutmose wrote to Butehamon from an area in Egypt further north than Thebes, his letter conveys the same despair as his letters from Nubia. The same language and phrases were used (Cerny 1939, no. 1; Wente 1967, 18-21; P.Leiden 1 369). The possibility that Butehamon did not take Dhutmose's complaints as seriously as Dhutmose intended is suggested by way in which Dhutmose was forced to commence this letter. First he enquired after the health of the workmen in western Thebes, and then complained that his letters had not been answered. Secondly, he asked that all those he had mentioned in the first part of the letter entreat the local deities on his behalf: 'Please may you tell Amun lord of the thrones of the two lands, and Meretseger to bring me back alive from *l3ꜣr* of *N3-mh3y*' (lines 9-10).

After this appeal, he managed to briefly address other matters, including looking after Butehamon and his family. He still thought it necessary, however, to reiterate his entreaties, this time with added information about his parlous physical state. 'Please tell Amun to bring me back. Indeed, I was ill when I reached the north, and I am not at all in my [usual] state' (lines vs 3-4). *l3ꜣr* was used to describe his location, perhaps to draw a contrast to *N3-mh3y*. This may have been a reference to a locality near Memphis (see Gauthier 1926, 17). The only other hint as to his locality was *hd* (north).

Even when *līḥr* was not used by Dhutmose as a name for his location, he still managed to convey his unhappiness at his plight. His displeasure at being in Nubia was no doubt due in part to being there on a military expedition, thus he was in a potentially more dangerous environment than Thebes. He revealed his unease as soon as he reached his superior at the frontier post of Elephantine (Cerny 1939, 7-8, no.4; Wente 1967, 24-7, no. 4; Janssen 1991, plate 94; P.Turin 1972), writing back to Butehamon. The intentions of this letter were partly to check up on people in Thebes, for example he asked that the daughter of Khonsmose be looked after (lines 11-13), but also to request twice that Butehamon enlist the help of the divine world to bring him back safe. In his second appeal, he asked that the gods of Medinet Habu be enlisted on his behalf: 'Please tell Amun and the gods of the Temple [Medinet Habu] to bring me back alive from the enemy' (lines vs.3-vs.4).

Despite Dhutmose's protests that his letters were not being replied to, replies from Butehamon do exist, and they show Dhutmose's instructions being carried out in full, with Butehamon apparently accepting that Dhutmose was in danger (Cerny 1939, 31-3, no. 16; Wente 1967, 49-51, no. 16; Janssen 1991, plates 92-3; P.Turin 1971; Figures 20-3; see above). Butehamon wanted him to return back home safe, away from the dangers presented by being outside Thebes. Butehamon thus began his letter by reassuring Dhutmose that he has been praying to the gods, as requested. He enumerated a long list of Theban gods, including Amun of Djeme [Medinet Habu], to whom he had prayed everyday, asking that Dhutmose's general favour him (lines 1-9). He specifically stated that he made these entreaties whilst standing in the 'open court' of Amun of the beautiful encounter. Butehamon concluded this initial section of the letter by asking that the gods of Dhutmose's locality hand him over to the gods of Thebes (lines 9-10).

Butehamon's prayers fulfilled word for word Dhutmose's repeated requests to him. This is particularly revealed by Late Ramesside letter no. 50 (Cerny 1939, 71-4, no.50; Wente 1967, 83-5, no.50; Janssen 1991, plates 103-104; P.Turin 2026; see above), in which Dhutmose once more emphasised that he was far away from home, and that he wished to return to *Kmt*. After stating that he has appealed to the local gods to bring him back safely and to bestow long life on Butehamon, he then enumerated what Butehamon was to say to the gods on his behalf: ' "[Bring] him back healthy and cause that he reaches home down to Egypt from the distant land which he is in, and [you will see him] standing in the open court, after you have rescued [him]", thus you will say to them' (lines 10-11).

Egypt as a separate entity to Nubia, as somewhere safe to return to, and as somewhere below Nubia is suggested by the phrase 'coming down to Egypt' (*r hry (r) Kmt*) seen in the above letter. Nubia itself could be called 'the land above' (*p3 t3 hryw*), its existence acknowledged in terms of its geographical relation to Egypt (see Cerny 1939, 64, no. 43; Wente 1967, 76-7, no. 43; Janssen 1991, plate 79; P.Bibl.Nat 197, VI). These terms, were not, however of fixed reference, but could also be used when going from the oasis/desert areas of Egypt into the Nile Valley. Thus, just as Dhutmose would have to return to Egypt from Nubia, so too, for example, did the eloquent peasant (see above) go from the Wadi Natrun *r Kmt*, from the edge to the centre (Parkinson 1991, 1, R 1.7).

r hry (r) Kmt was used in other letters; for example Butehamon wrote to Shedsuhor, the individual escorting Dhutmose to Nubia (Cerny 1939, 48-9, no. 29; Wente 1967, 65, no. 29; Janssen 1991, plates 33-4; P.Brit.Mus. 10284). For Shedsuhor as well, the journey out of Egypt was one of potential dangers, thus Butehamon had also been asking the gods to bring Shedsuhor back safe (lines 2-6). He repeated this desire,

asking in the letter that Amun 'may bring you back alive, safe and healthy down [to] Egypt and I may fill [my] embrace with you, the gods of the land in which you are having rescued [you] and may they hand you over [to] the gods of your town and may you become satisfied with *Nhwt* and *Nhwt* satisfied with you' (lines 4-7). Thus to return to Egypt, Shedsuhor would also have had to 'come down'. Moreover, there was no need to actually name Thebes as the home destination: *Nhwt* (town) was used to refer to Thebes as no other word was necessary - it was *the* town (Gauthier 1926, 75).

That Dhutmose might have been considered somewhat of a liability when travelling beyond Thebes is suggested by the second part of this letter which consists of instructions to Shedsuhor to look after him. Butehamon described the dangers which the inexperienced or nervous traveller, such as Dhutmose, would have been exposed to. His military inexperience was also a source for concern (Thijs 2000, 64). Dhutmose was referred to as the 'scribe of the necropolis, Tjaroy' (a standard nickname) in this letter, and Butehamon told Shedsuhor to take care of him as: 'You know that [he is] a man who does not have any experience whatsoever, for he has never before made the journeys which he is on' (lines 7-9). The text continued with the reiteration that Dhutmose was inexperienced as he had 'never before seen a fearful face' (line 11). As seen in the model letter discussed above, the inhabitants of a non-Egyptian locale added to its strangeness, and any fear when encountering them was due to a lack of experience.

This series of letters reveal a marked reluctance to travel outside the home locality, and if such a journey was unavoidable, then those at home were expected to provide extensive support. Dhutmose's letters home were full of demands; those he wrote to had to pray to the gods for his safe return, and had to look after his affairs and responsibilities in Thebes. The mortuary temple of Ramesses III around which they lived was where these prayers had to be made for Dhutmose. Thus it was appropriate

that such requests may have been made in the first court of a temple covered with condemnations of the non-Egyptian (see Plate 1). Yet it is also significant that equal effort had to be invested by Dhutmose's community to bring him back safe from areas within Egypt.

The pull of the home locality was very strong, as was the fear of dying away from home. This reflected literary tradition, and drew upon themes seen in the *Tale of Sinuhe*: yet in Dhutmose's letters he did not specify that dying outside Egypt was the cause for concern, rather he simply stated that dying away from Thebes was to be avoided. He was just as worried about dying within Egypt, but outside Thebes, as he was about dying in Nubia. Ironically, he may well have died outside Thebes. This is suggested by a graffito written by Butehamon in western Thebes (Sweeney 2001, 119).

The letters above thus illustrate the importance of locally based identities running alongside a wider perception of Egyptian-ness. Both were a necessary aspect to the Egyptian state. Stability was enhanced through a dislike of movement (associated with dangerous nomadic tribes, outcasts and only acceptable when undertaken on behalf of the state) and through a wider acceptance of the role of the Egyptian king in maintaining Egypt's borders. Despite order being associated with anything within Egypt, it was also accepted that an individual would (and should) prefer to remain in her/his home environment, and that other regions in Egypt might be unsettling. Hence, the oft-repeated theme of the disordered region, or the corrupt local official (compare with Stalinist Russia - see above and Fitzpatrick 1999, 177) alongside the yearning for a home city (see Chapter 3) and the acceptance that the king was the ultimate source of order, despite the layers of disorder below him.

Maintenance of the familiar

Thus the home, encompassing family, friends, servants as well as local deities, could provide a central aspect to self-perception for an individual, and anything outside that immediate network could be threatening. Extant letters demonstrate a desire to maintain networks of friendship during all periods of the New Kingdom, not just the Late Ramesside period. These professions of friendship, protestations of missing an individual could also form part of careful approach to a request for assistance, and were made by different levels of literate society, from those with nationally based power, as well as those with a more local power base, or none at all. They also expose a desire for the proper running of society, for the maintenance of values expressed in sources such as the instruction texts (see above) and in tomb autobiographies.

A whole series of letters survive which were written to and from an eighteenth dynasty official, Ahmose. Amongst these is a letter, the sole purpose of which was to ask Ahmose if he was well (Glanville 1928, 303-304, plate XXXII, fig. 1, plate XXXIII fig.2, plate XXXV; Wente 1990, 91, no. 114; P.Brit.Mus. 10103; Figure 25). This was written by an official named Hori; Glanville noted that 'whether the motive for the letter was politeness pure and simple, or a preliminary to a request, we cannot tell' (1928, 303). The letter itself was only five lines long, the first three and a half lines taken up with the necessary greetings at a beginning of a letter. Hori asked that the gods and goddesses grant Ahmose a long and healthy life. Only in the last line and a half of the letter, did Hori convey any information, asking: 'How are you, how are you? Are you well? Behold I am well.'

Hori's letter is unusually minimal: frequently expressions such as he made in his letter formed part of a series of wider requests. For example, in an unprovenanced letter suggested to date from the late 18th/early 19th dynasty (Barns 1948, 35), the writer addressed several problems as well as including an emotional request from a chantress

of Amun (Barns 1948, plate IX-X; Wente 1990, 113-4, no. 132; P.Northumberland I). Meh, the letter writer, asked the younger Yey that he treat the chariot officer Merymose properly, unlike the time when Yey had not given Meh his full quota of rations. Then Meh passed on the request of the 'chantress of Amun, Isisnofre' that: 'my heart desires to see you very much, with my eyes as big as Memphis because I am hungry to see you' (line 12 vs 1). Isisnofre's request to see Yey was written in a style seen also in love poetry. It created a contrast with the rest of the letter, and was put in as a quote from Isisnofre, made distinct from Meh's requests, which were purely concerned with business (see Baines 2001, 20).

One way of phrasing business requests was to include a section expressing a desire on the part of the petitioner to see the addressee. Maanakhtef, a carpenter during the twentieth dynasty at Deir el Medina, wrote a functional (and unfinished) letter to a superior, the vizier's scribe Amenmose (Kitchen 1983, 672, no. 2; Wente 1990, 168-9, no. 285; P.DM 9). The purpose of the letter was to ask for more supplies so that Maanakhtef could prepare varnish for a coffin. Presumably in an attempt to achieve a positive reply, Maanakhtef began the letter by stating 'it is my desire to hear about your condition a thousand times a day as you have not come this year' (line 2). Immediately after this statement, Maanakhtef launched into much less exalted language for his demands.

The letters between Dhutmose and his son Butehamon demonstrate the importance of maintaining a certain way of life. In one of Dhutmose's letters, a microcosm of the ideal way of carrying out life in Egypt was presented: he desired that those values propagated by the state were carried out in the small scale of his home environment (Cerny 1939, 9-11, no 5; Wente 1967, 27-32, no. 5; Janssen 1991, plate 66-7; P.Leiden I 370). So his son was encouraged to look after the women and children, to ensure that the work in the fields was carried out, to guard the conscripts, further literacy and ensure that the men in Dhutmose's house were clothed. Those actions were

the sort of actions which elite individuals had proclaimed they had done during their lives in their autobiographies from the Old Kingdom onwards, and were recommended in the instruction texts. In particular, the instruction to protect women, children and to prevent anyone from having to go naked was repeated again and again. Dhutmose fully integrated himself into this tradition of how one should act as an esteemed member of Egyptian society. This list of instructions formed the second part of the letter, the first part of which was concerned with matters such as the transport of grain

The sense of belonging generated by both family and physical locality is suggested by the frequency with which Dhutmose referred to 'my people'. This term was apparently inclusive, comprising men and women of all ages, as shown by a letter written by Amenhotep to Dhutmose whilst he was in Nubia (Cerny 1939, 28-30, no. 15; Wente 1967, 47-9, no. 15; Janssen 1991, plates 90-1; P.Phillipps). This letter asked that Dhutmose refrain from exposing himself to danger - his role was advisory rather than combative (lines 10-13). Therefore, Dhutmose was 'not to abandon (*h3'*) any of us at all. Indeed you know that you are the father of all of us' (lines 13-4). The verb used for 'abandon' was also used by Butehamon when expressing his distaste at being in *h3'r* (see above).

When writing home, Dhutmose inquired after his people, and when replied to he was dutifully informed about how they were (for example see Cerny 1939, 22-3, no. 11; Wente 1967, 43-4, no. 11; Janssen 1991, plate 75; P.Bibl.Nat.197, II). In Late Ramesside letter no. 16 (Cerny 1939, 31-3, no. 16; Wente 1967, 49-51, no. 16; Janssen 1991, plates 92-3; P.Turin 1971; Figures 20-3; see above), Butehamon told Dhutmose that 'the children are well, Hemsheri and her children are well, and no harm has befallen them. All your people are alive, prosperous and healthy. You are the one whom they tell Amun of the thrones of the two lands to bring back alive, prosperous and healthy, and we shall fill our embrace with you' (lines vs 8-10).

Terms of exclusivity and difference

A wider sense of group identification for those in Deir el Medina, above that of family and retinue/dependents, but below that of the state, was demonstrated in the term *ms-hr*. This was translated by Edwards (1960, 10, note 7) as 'young (employee) of the royal tomb', whereas Cerny (1973, 28) preferred the more literal rendering of 'young boys of the tomb'. He argued that it only referred to male children (Cerny 1973, 117), who would then become workmen on the royal tombs when older. It has come to be understood as 'native of the necropolis community', incorporating the sense of *ms* which literally means 'child', but allowing for a greater flexibility in the actual age of the *ms-hr*.

Being a *ms-hr* served to differentiate people within Thebes, and was itself a term conferred by, and recognised by, the state. Thus the state could confer special treatment upon those who were identified as *ms-hr*. For example, in a letter about a crime supposedly committed by a *ms-hr*, the criminal was let off because of his special status (Birch 1868, plate XVIII; Erman 1905, 100-106; Cerny and Gardiner 1957, plate 88; Wente 1990, no. 196; O.BM 5631, rt; Figure 26).

The letter writer had been accused of stealing tools. His twelve servants were taken away, as well as him, in place of the tools. But due to his special status as a native of the necropolis community, his father was able to make representations to the pharaoh and have him set him free: 'My father reported to the pharaoh, life, prosperity, health, and he caused that I was set free, because I am a *ms-hr*' (lines 13-4). This statement demonstrates the perceived close relationship between the king and Deir el Medina, or at

least that was how those in Deir el Medina chose to depict it. The importance of the writer was heightened through his statement that he was only saved through the personal intervention of the king. As noted by McDowell (1990, 242-4), documents from Deir el Medina illustrate the frequent intervention of the king in the community, in sometimes trivial matters. McDowell (1990, 244) argued that this intervention may not have been exceptional; if there had been only a small number of elite (of which the Deir el Medina community was a part) then it would realistically have been possible to look after them at a more personal level.

ms-hr was also used by the inhabitants of Deir el Medina as a simple term of description. Dhutmose, living in Medinet Habu, wrote to Hori in eastern Thebes about the move of the community (Cerny 1939, 23-4, no. 12; Wente 1967, 44-5, no. 12; Janssen 1991, plates 53-4; P.Berlin 10494): 'Now we are living here in the Temple [Medinet Habu] and you know the way in which we live both inside and outside. Now the *ms-hr* have returned. They are living in *Nḥwṛ*, and I am living alone here with the scribe of the army Pentahunakht' (lines 6-9). The dispersal of the whole community, not only the *ms-hr*, is illustrated by Dhutmose's request that the 'men of the necropolis' be sent by Hori from eastern Thebes (*Nḥwṛ*) back to western Thebes (lines 9-10, see also Cerny 1973, 370). In the same letter, the Meshwesh (lines vs.4-5) were mentioned (possibly in the context of an attack - see Wente 1967, 45), and it is against this background that the fragmented Deir el Medina community, including the *ms-hr*, seem to be living on both the east and west banks at Thebes.

Further categorisation of groups of Egyptians, not only of groups of allegedly non-Egyptians, could also feature in letters. For example, in a dynasty 19 letter from Deir el Medina the writer asked the recipient, a woman, about the *ḥwṛw* (Cerny and Gardiner 1957, plate 73, no. 2; Wente 1990, 165, no. 270; O.Petrie 62). The meaning of *ḥwṛw*

could either be impoverished, or despicable people, depending on the context. The recipient was asked that she provided various items to the writer, such as papyri. The letter then concluded with the statement: 'And write to me about your condition, the condition of the woman Tadjedjepiti, and the condition of Basa and the *ḥwṛw*' (lines 3-5).

The experience of being an Egyptian was necessarily conditioned by the immediate surroundings of an individual. Within a limited personal sphere, some of the prime identity markers were those of social status or occupation, with the wider concept of being an Egyptian far in the background.

Facing apparent ideological failure

Despite the expressed confidence of the elite in their ideological system, the support of the religious world in the maintenance of Egyptian order, with the king supreme amongst Egyptians, there was also the inevitable threat of the collapse of that ideological system. Thus whenever disorder threatened, it was dealt with speedily. As seen in the strike papyri, and in letters from a royal context, an underlying acceptance of the inability of the state to contain subversive elements was freely acknowledged. There was an understanding that ideological statements generated by the elite could not be universally true, yet at the same time this did not undermine the statements themselves, but made them all the more necessary.

Public disorder

As the king was able to acknowledge that he needed help from non-Egyptians in order to maintain the state, so were other Egyptians able to deal with disorder in their midst. This could cover failures to conduct life as recommended in the Instruction texts, as well as perceived criminal activities. The only way of accessing any subversive

activities against the state are through the records of those who were trying to prevent and control them.

In letters, such activities were discussed, as were the methods of control. For example, in a letter (from Deir el Medina) from the first part of dynasty 19 (Bakir 1970, plates 26-78, XXXIII; Wente 1990, 124, no. 146; McDowell 1999, 186, no. 143 B; P.Turin 1977), the punishment of a Medjay called Nakhtseti was enumerated. He had attacked someone, and this action led him to be compared to an enemy of the sun god: 'The Medjay Nakhseti is in the compulsory labour because he struck with the stick and was like every enemy of Pre' (lines 2-3).

During the Late Ramesside period, the secret punishment of two Medjay was ordered in a series of letters. Their crime seems merely to have been that of saying something they should not have done (see Sweeney 2001, 173), but the letters do not enlarge on the matter. Instead, the pre-occupation of the letters seems to be their punishment. This had to be done without anyone finding out. The letters were written by Piankh (in Nubia) to Dhutmose (in western Thebes - Cerny 1939, 36-7, no. 21; Wente 1967, 53-4, no. 21; Janssen 1991, plate 50; P.Berlin 10487; Figures 27-8), Payshuben (in western Thebes - Cerny 1939, 53-4, no. 34; Wente 1967, 69, no.34; Janssen 1991, plate 51; P.Berlin 10488) and Nuteme who was in eastern Thebes (Cerny 1939, 54, no. 35; Wente 1967, 69, no. 35; Janssen 1991, plate 52; P.Berlin 10489). Nuteme was possibly either Piankh's wife or his daughter (Sweeney 2001, 173). The same punishment (death) was ordered in all the letters. The two Medjay were never named.

In the letter to Dhutmose, Piankh ordered that Dhutmose was to question the Medjay, to see if there was any truth in the allegations made against them. If there was, then the Medjay were to be killed: 'if they find out that [it is] true, you shall place them in two baskets and they shall be cast into the water at night - do not let anyone of the land find out' (lines 6-8). This is the only letter in which Piankh failed to mention that the Medjay

were to be killed before being placed in the baskets; thus it was not intended to execute them by drowning, this was instead a way of concealing their bodies. In theory, the king had the exclusive right of ordering the death penalty (McDowell 1990, 242-3), perhaps dictating the necessity for the secrecy surrounding this locally imposed 'justice'.

Yet, the secrecy surrounding this episode also contains within it an atmosphere of subterfuge, as it is in this same letter that Piankh appears to have questioned the authority of the theoretical apex of his world, the king. Immediately after ordering the disposal of the bodies, Piankh started a new section of the letter by asking: 'Another matter: as for the Pharaoh, life, prosperity, health, just how will he reach this land? And as for the Pharaoh, life, prosperity, health, whose superior (*hry*) is he still?' (lines 8-vs.1). Sweeney's (2001, 145) translation of *hry* as 'boss' emphasises the power of Piankh's words. This series of apparently rhetorical questions reflects the general diminution in the king's power during this period, the very end of the New Kingdom (see Baines 1991, 198 referring directly to this letter). Any ideological statements produced by Ramesses XI (see Peden 1994, 112-4) could not obscure his failure to carry out his duties sufficiently, and Piankh seems to have been willing to point to the king's inadequacies. As the general of southern Egypt, he was in a position to deny the authority of the king, and assume responsibility for keeping order - hence the punishment of these two Medjay.

Prison was another punishment given to people who failed to abide by certain standards. Such a punishment was threatened in a letter, between the 'standard bearer Maiseti' and the 'garrison captains who are in the northern region' (Bakir 1970, plate 1, I-II; Wente 1990, 114-5, no. 133; P.Cairo 58053; Figures 29-31). This letter has been dated on to the late 18th/early 19th dynasty (Bakir 1970, 2-3). Maiseti complained that those addressed in the letter had not been treating the 'god's personnel who are in Tell

el-Balamun' correctly, and he ended the letter with a threat: 'when this letter reaches you, you will not let service for the god there be inactive or you will be imprisoned' (lines vs 1-2). Maiseti discussed imprisonment in another letter, written to an official called Hat (Bakir 1970, plate 3-4, V-VI; Wente 1990, 115-6, no. 135; P.Cairo 58055). In this letter, the administration of a prison was discussed, and Maiseti ordered Hat not to move the prisoners until explicitly commanded to, and to keep control of them. If he failed, Maiseti threatened to kill him - 'you will die under my hand' (line 7).

Failure to live as an Egyptian should

Non-criminal behaviour, but nevertheless behaviour which was not perceived as fitting for the ideal conduct of life could be just as worrying. In Deir el Medina, a husband treated his wife harshly because he felt her family was not supporting them (with material goods) as they ought. In voicing his complaint, threatening his wife with divorce, the husband himself was not treating his wife with the respect recommended in instruction texts, and she thus outlined the situation to her sister, expressing her disquiet (Cerny and Gardiner 1957, plate 70 (2); Wente 1990, 147-8, no. 200; McDowell 1999, 42, no 16; O.Prague 1826). The woman reported the threat which her husband had made to her: 'briefly if you say anything, you will go to *Kmt*' (lines 10-11). *Kmt* was used here specifically, the Black land, ie the cultivation as opposed to the desert edge where the couple were living in Deir el Medina (Wente 1990, 170; McDowell 1999, 42). Access to letter writing allowed this woman to make an appeal for help against her apparently unjust treatment.

A text which seems to embody what it meant to be a Theban Egyptian is that known as 'Menna's letter' (O 12074; Cerny and Gardiner 1957, LXXVIII-LXXIX; Foster 1984; McDowell 1999, 144-7). In this text, written in the style of a letter but drawing on other textual traditions to create a literary work, Menna reprimanded his son. Both

Menna and his son, Pa-iry, were well-known individuals in the Deir el Medina community (see McDowell 1999, 145). Menna noted his wasted efforts in bringing up his son correctly. Pa-iry had spurned all of his father's best attempts, and was not at home like he should be.

The text as a whole thus incorporates many of the themes of this chapter. It demonstrates a knowledge of earlier Egyptian literature (the Middle Kingdom texts of the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* and the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*) by a New Kingdom resident of Deir el Medina. It also seems to witness to a genuine motivation on the part of that resident to compose a literary text, in the style of a letter, in order to publicise his son's behaviour (already renowned in Deir el Medina). It thus implies that there was a desire to use literacy skills outside the immediate context of work, and suggests a willingness to use 'leisure' time for such purposes (see McDowell 1999, 144). The ideal of learning promoted in those texts incorporated into scribal manuals was apparently taken up by this individual, at least. He also seems to have absorbed the recommended social norms, to have accepted them, and have been able to generate his own text which entirely fitted into the Egyptian context. As a reaction to failure it was a proper response of a literate Egyptian and further highlighted the contrast between the right-thinking father and the son who had failed to live as an Egyptian should. The text ended (line 15, verso, plate 79) with the recommendation that Pa-iry look after 'this letter' as it 'will be an instruction'.

Conclusion

The letters looked at in this chapter derived from across the time-span denoted as the New Kingdom, but especially from the 19th and the 20th dynasties. Despite other locations being represented, the majority of letters contain expressions of what it meant to be an Egyptian in Upper Egypt, in Thebes, when it was no longer the centre of power for Egypt as a whole. These limitations upon the evidence obviously mean that any conclusions cannot be held to stand firm for the whole of literate society in Egypt, many of whose populations are unknown and unrecorded.

Nevertheless, several conclusions about the world of those who wrote the letters do emerge. The strength of the ideological system in Egypt is suggested by the forms of the letters, which, for the most part, included formulaic expressions of respect towards the addressee and the religious (and sometimes the royal) world. Likewise, the clarity of thought on what comprised correct (Egyptian) behaviour, or on what the duties of the king were, implies a willingness to abide by the central definitions of Egyptian-ness. Not surprisingly, given their authorship, letters seemed to feed upon and reflect ideas seen in other types of text current in Egypt. The blurring of boundaries between different types of texts was enhanced through the composition of literary texts in the style of letters, and through the inclusion of letters in monumental contexts.

Yet what these letters also highlight is the inability of an ideological system, however strong, to exclude doubt. Dogmatic statements of self/other made within textual settings did not automatically reflect the lived reality of New Kingdom Egypt. In this chapter it has emerged that there was an understanding that such statements were not universally applicable, and that they depicted an *ideal* world. Even the apex of the Egyptian world, the king, failed to eliminate inconsistencies from his presentation of the world; he was the king who quelled non-Egyptians yet he also chose to depend upon non-Egyptians. This apparently opposed set of actions was for the same purpose; that of maintaining the Egyptian state, the reference point for the king's subjects. The definition of who should be eliminated and who should be incorporated into the state was fluid. This was despite the country of origin of an individual being a prime identity marker in the letters. What seemed to have mattered more about an individual was whether he/she was a source of disorder within the state. Thus, in very broad terms, a non-Egyptian could be welcomed into the state or excluded just as an Egyptian could be - even if in an ideal world it was more comfortable to assign disorder to the outsider.

Any perception of the outside world could be just as fluid. The hostile environment encircling Egypt's edges could begin as soon as an individual left home, regardless of whether or not the Egyptian (as opposed to Nubian) Nile Valley had been left behind. This stemmed not solely from a perception that all that was outside one's home was inevitably negative, but also from a desire to be amongst those who were important to the individual, who bestowed a sense of belonging and safety. Letters expressing such thoughts were reflected by (and reflected) similar expressions in literary texts. Thus, for some, the disordered world began not on the limits of Egypt's power, but as soon as the world personally known to an individual was abandoned.

At the same time, such a reaction to enforced travel could be assigned to inexperience. The experienced individual could encounter the non-Egyptian world, an area supposed to be threatening, and return to tease the inexperienced individual about the fears allegedly lurking there. The fear of a non-Egyptian could be removed once that individual was known. Thus in his letters the homesick Dhutmose quite happily referred to a number of allegedly non-Egyptians whom he knew and upon whom he depended. As in more modern contexts, the acceptability of an individual could depend on his/her ability to conform to (and identify with) the predominant cultural system. And the presence of those who failed to conform meant that the image of the ignorant/cunning non-Egyptian continued to ring true despite the many counter-examples.

Knowledge could undermine Egyptian ideological statements and reveal a more complicated world. At the same time the letters of literate individuals, whether close to the king or not, portrayed a distinct world which now seems recognisably Egyptian. The letter writer was not able to (or did not wish to) bypass the conventions of his/her society. Within these conventions, however, there remain hints of variant world-views and of the inadequacies necessarily encompassed by the ideological system in New Kingdom Egypt.

CHAPTER THREE

NEW KINGDOM MEMPHIS

Textual sources revealing the motivations, interests and loyalties of New Kingdom Egyptians demonstrated a range of opinions despite the inevitably small sector of the population which generated the texts. Even within the royal domain, for example, bold statements of disdain for the non-Egyptian were undermined by a dependence on the non-Egyptian. Much of the material discussed in Chapter 2 was written by Theban Egyptians, and as such a frequent theme was the importance of home, of the familiar locality, and with it the local deities. In this chapter, the physical and built environment of the royal city of Memphis is analysed. The settlement area of the city is the focus, comprising its royal, ceremonial as well as residential and working areas. As one of the major cities in New Kingdom Egypt, and as a gateway to the non-Egyptian world, the city of Memphis has the potential to reveal much about the identities and loyalties of its citizens.

Studying the ancient urban environment

Contemporary and historical urban environments have been routinely investigated as sources for uncovering the lives and motivations of their inhabitants, and social order. Architecture is able both to limit and to enable certain human behaviours, for example, 'architectural partitions usually are conscious manipulations by humans to create boundaries where they do not exist in nature' (Kent 1997, 2). Yet any interpretation of a built form in the past is complicated by the different levels of understanding and meaning involved in its construction and use. Thus as many aspects as possible of that environment need to be recovered.

In Rapoport's extensive studies of built environments from contemporary California to one of the first urban settlements, Çatal Huyuk, he has isolated the different elements of the urban setting: 'fixed-feature elements', 'semi-fixed feature elements' to 'non-fixed feature elements'. Certain general expectations of how power can be communicated in an urban setting have emerged from his work: for example, the centrality of a building, its height, or its uniqueness denoting its importance (Rapoport 1982, 107-11, 115-7).

A model elucidating the different stages in construction and meaning of the urban environment highlights these apparently cross-culturally applicable elements, some of which appear immediately relevant to the formal areas of an ancient Egyptian city (see Rapoport 1982, 120, fig 17). Indeed, the ancient Egyptian palace was used as an example by Rapoport:

'Here a wide variety of architectural manipulation and ornament was used to produce a suitable feeling of awe in visitors. Note the implication that it was self-evident to all and that we can still so interpret it. The palace was a set of messages to communicate awe and subservience: absolute size, scale, settings, approach, spatial sequence, color, doorways, panelling, and other decoration, courtiers, costumes, furnishings, and many other elements were used to create a setting overwhelming in itself - and even more so in the context of the typical mud-brick villages and even larger houses' (1982, 117).

The features listed by Rapoport in his analysis of an ancient Egyptian palace well illustrate the necessity of, as far as is possible, examining the architecture in its setting with, wherever possible, its actors (Rapoport 1997, 18).

The architecture and layout of an urban setting, of the ceremonial and non-ceremonial areas, is also determined by the way in which the living society of that place is organised (Bawden 1997, 153). It can be difficult to access the motivations of individuals in the past through the architectural layout of their city as even domestic areas could be dependent on the dominant ideology of that society. For example, in elite houses in the town of Cuenca, Ecuador, during the period of Spanish rule, the colonial message was reinforced even within this domestic setting through the segregation of space (Jamieson 2000, 203).

It is also possible to manipulate domestic space in situations with apparently little potential. For example, Puerto Ricans living in council housing in Boston managed to retain and to communicate their identity within a monolithic housing block through the use of semi-fixed elements such as Puerto Rican decorative objects (Rapoport 1982, 94). In Stalinist Russia, when living in ideologically defined domestic spaces generated by central government, people were still able to adapt and personalise them (Buchli 2000).

It is not possible to use such studies as a direct model for ancient Egypt, a society clearly distant from Spanish Ecuador, the contemporary USA or Stalinist Russia. What these studies do demonstrate, however, is the point that individuals can exert some control and influence over their domestic space even when under an authoritarian state. Ancient Egypt has been viewed as one of the ultimate authoritarian regimes in which individual expression and action on the periphery of the state was limited, if not excluded. Through examining the urban layout and material finds of Memphis, it should be possible to provide some assessment of how far official ideological motivations were followed by a wider sample of the populace, and how far that population was able to move around areas in the city, including its religious and ceremonial areas.

Cities in ancient Egypt

Despite Wilson's (1960, 135) statement that Egypt lacked cities in comparison to Mesopotamia, he also acknowledged that 'it is clearly not a matter of the presence or absence of a phenomenon but perhaps only a matter of degree' (1960, 150). This latter statement has been extended by later scholars who have emphasised the extent of urbanism in ancient Egypt (see O'Connor 1972, 683; Kemp 1977a; 1977b; Bietak 1979). The lack of settlement sites left to modern onlookers has been attributed both to

the physical environment (the difficulties of excavating on the floodplain) and to the priorities of archaeologists (see Kemp 1984; Cannuyer 1989, 45; Giddy 1999a; Grimal 2000, 54). Furthermore, the straight application of modern geographical definitions of cities to ancient Egypt can be irrelevant (Shaw 1998, 1050).

A range of settlement types in ancient Egypt have been identified (see Adams, M, 1997), with the differences between cities and towns/villages seen not so much in terms of size, but rather in terms of the presence of a metropolitan as opposed to an agricultural population (Eyre 1999a, 35-9). Nevertheless, Redford (1997b, 212-3, 217) has emphasised the close links between the metropolitan population and rural areas, distinct from a contemporary western view of urbanism. The process of urbanisation of Egypt has depicted the kings of Egypt as town planners, keenly involved in the development of towns in Egypt: 'the Egyptian rulers, whether pharaohs or nomarchs were the first to devise an urbanising policy in founding towns (pyramid towns, artisans' towns, and new towns) pre-planned to accommodate a fixed population unit averaging 10,000 inhabitants' (Badawy 1967, 109).

Despite Badawy's dubious aims to depict the kings of Egypt as liberal, progressive and community-minded individuals, the city in ancient Egypt was nonetheless an important aspect to the state, somewhere which was closely linked to the king (Lichtheim 1980a, 15). It has been argued to have been the very essence of ancient Egypt, at the heart of its religious beliefs as the locality of deities (Cannuyer 1989, 47-8), and therefore central to the identity of an ancient Egyptian:

'For the ancient Egyptians, the concept of the city was thus first and foremost determined by religion. To live in a city meant to be in the proximity of the deity who had dominion there. To belong to a city meant to be in the jurisdiction of that city's deity. In Egypt, everyone had "his" city and "his" deity, whom he "followed" and who cared for him' (Assmann 2001, 19-20).

The religious aspect to life in an ancient Egyptian city was therefore absolutely central to forming any sort of communal identity (see Baines 1997, 235) - Coptic Thebes is a later example of just such a living environment - and in Memphis there were a multitude of

deities to whom loyalty could be given. Assmann's argument is based upon textual sources, and he also stated that 'we must accept literally the statement that it was precisely in its aspect of divine dwelling that a city bound people to one another and made them feel at home' (2001, 25). From an examination of wisdom literature, it has been argued that the Egyptian was distrustful of the non-Egyptian, but that living in the same city could create bonds (Cannuyer 1989, 51). Nevertheless, Cannuyer (1989, 54) concluded that the wisdom texts describe '*une cité plutôt xénophobe ou égocentrique*'.

Memphis and Thebes were two of the major political and population centres in New Kingdom Egypt, with each city in its turn the location for the administration and government of Egypt and its territory (see Traunecker 1988). In the 18th Dynasty Thebes was the capital; in the course of the New Kingdom, Amarna, Memphis and Piramesses (Herold 1998, 129) were successively the royal strongholds. Throughout these changes in centres of power, Memphis retained its position as one of the central cities in Egypt (Grimal 2000, 58). Its location (Figure 32), at the southern end of the Delta, on the western side of the River Nile, as well as its religiosity, ensured its continuous occupation until its demise as a centre for intensive occupation during the first few centuries CE.

Each of the pre-eminent cities had elements within it which were constructed with careful attention to the maintenance and furtherance of the Egyptian world view. The New Kingdom royal city has been characterised thus:

'the royal city was regarded as an axis mundi, a specific intensely sacred area in which the divine creation of the universe was continually re-enacted, the forces of supernatural chaos successfully resisted, and the great cycle of the supernatural renewal of nature and of the institutions of Egyptian society maintained in perpetuity' (O'Connor 1982, 19).

The paradigm for much of the knowledge of ancient Egyptian cities is Amarna, purely as a result of it being the best-preserved and most extensively excavated city in Egypt. Its unique origins as the city of Akhenaten, built, lived in and abandoned in fifteen years, nevertheless do not need to disqualify it as a site with wider implications for the

understanding of the articulation of power (see Kemp 1977a). For example, the city plan was dominated by the king's palace (Kemp 1986, 92).

Alongside the planned approach to the development of sacred and royal areas, as exemplified in Thebes and Amarna, there was also a much more organic element in the construction of space. With reference to Amarna, excavations have demonstrated that there was little planning of the housing areas of the city, which instead grew up gradually and haphazardly (Shaw 1992, 150). As in the modern world, roads stimulated development (Kemp and Garfi 1993, 47). Any development of housing areas was in stages as new people arrived in the new city.

Memphis was in a different category to Amarna, having a long and continuous history of occupation. The origins of the city lie in the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom when it was the capital of Egypt, and it grew and developed throughout the pharaonic period, even when no longer the capital of Egypt (Baines and Malek 1992, 134; Martin 1992, 21). Thus the New Kingdom city had developed out of a number of adjoining settlement areas, with no 'grand plan' for the non-royal/sacred areas; Memphis has been typified as 'an agglomeration of various villages, precincts, and defensive towns, which gradually merged together, like London, into a large city' (Smith 1938, 215). This comparison to London was also made by Petrie (1909a, 1).

As suggested by studies on other urban environments, it has been possible to trace individual and communal assertions of status and wealth in an ancient Egyptian city. The largest homes in Amarna (of over 250 square metres) mirrored the pictures of 'ideal homes' provided in textual and pictorial sources, such as Papyrus Lansing (Shaw 1992, 151, 162). Such houses were made distinct from other areas of housing, through the use of large scale boundary walls (Shaw 1992, 161) alongside the spacious grounds (Shaw 1992, 164): 'the possession of copious surrounding areas of garden and granaries allowed a few successful town-dwellers to recreate the spacious

environment of rural life within a generally cramped urban context, as well as gaining a considerable degree of economic self-sufficiency'. The apparently architecturally homogenous areas of housing in Amarna, in which the lower stratum of the population lived, were also areas within which differences were made and asserted through the possession of objects (Shaw 1992, 164).

The lack of detailed contextual excavations of settlements in Egypt means that such insights are rare. Even in the most complete site, Amarna, which enabled Shaw's observations, inferences about the reasons behind the organisation of space often have to remain as inferences:

'we know next to nothing about urban organisation and attitudes in ancient Egypt, but one can imagine that people travelling from the remoter parts of the city, particularly after sundown, would have found some of the city neighbourhoods unwelcoming (not least through the attacks of watch-dogs), or under the supervision of watchmen, or even closed altogether to outsiders' (Kemp and Garfi 1993, 47).

Memphis

The most visible features of the ancient city of Memphis are its burial grounds which were developed from the early dynastic period onwards, initially as royal and elite cemeteries (Jeffreys 1998). They comprise the pyramid fields of Abu Rawash, Giza, Zawyet el Aryan, Abusir, Saqqara and Dahshur, some of the most visited sites in Egypt (Figure 32). The extent of the cemeteries (30 kilometres) was not matched in size by the living New Kingdom city. Estimating the size of the New Kingdom city is complex, due not only to the shifting course of the Nile, but also to the necessarily partial nature of any excavations. Yet on the basis of Amarna's 440 hectares, Memphis in the New Kingdom is thought to have been a very sizeable settlement (Kemp 1977b, 195); the known area of the city stretches 1.5 kilometres west to east, and 4 kilometres north to south, which would only have formed 10% of the city at its largest point (Jeffreys 2001, 373). Its geographical location has been described as 'unrivalled' (Jeffreys 2001, 373), combining access to the Delta, as well as to the eastern and

western desert trade routes, and with its location near Helwan which was the 'national and symbolic boundary between Upper and Lower Egypt' (Jeffreys 2001, 373).

In secondary literature about New Kingdom Memphis, the city is depicted as a thriving urban centre, a place in which Egyptians and non-Egyptians freely intermingled and lived and in which the business of empire was carried out (Kees 1977, 179; Kitchen 1982, 115), and has thus been termed 'la métropole par excellence' (Grimal 2000, 58). The series of excavations (the major ones by Petrie, Fisher, Anthes and Jeffreys) which have been carried out in the course of the twentieth century, (excavations at the site are still ongoing), provide information on the royal/religious complexes of the city as well as the non-ceremonial (for general maps of the excavated areas see Kemp 1977a, figure 7; Zivie 1982, 26; Jeffreys 1996, 289). The archaeological reports as well as New Kingdom texts, and any relevant comparative material, are central to the reclaiming of New Kingdom Memphis, and in gaining any understanding of levels of interaction possible between different groups of people and the widely differing areas of the city.

Maps of the ruin fields of Memphis reveal the tiny proportion of the city which has been excavated (see Jeffreys 1985, 7). Much of the area has been incorporated into modern settlements, and the visible features of the existence of an ancient site include the ten mounds enumerated by Jeffreys (1985, 17-45; 2001, 374). Most of the excavations have concentrated on the areas immediately adjoining, as well as within, the great temple complex of Ptah, in the hope of finding statuary, in the south section of the site. Thus in the discussion below there is reference to certain mounds in particular; Kom el Rabi'a and Kom el Qala'a (Figure 33).

Memphis as described in textual sources

The products of the high elite culture leave no doubt as to the meanings and identity to be gained from being a resident of Memphis. A well-recognised topos in New

Kingdom literature was that of desire to be in or near the city that was home (see Lichtheim 1980a, 16; Assmann 2001, 19-27). As such it could appear both in more formalised literature (the Book of the Dead) and in the more informal love poetry from the Ramesside period. As mentioned above, the longing to be in the home city was heightened by the wish to be near the deities of that location.

In Book of the Dead (chapter 183) Hennunefer described Memphis, the city he came from (Budge 1899, 4-6, plates 2-3; Allen 1974, 200-2). Certain characteristics of Memphis were highlighted. The city served to unite the two areas of Egypt: it was the focus of both Upper and Lower Egypt, and importantly, it was a place where the god lived. It was not only as a place to be praised and longed for after death that Memphis featured in textual writings. The love poetry of the Ramesside period, often seen as giving access to a rare expression of individual and highly personalized emotions, when it may really have been the generalised product of a scholarly elite, pictured Memphis as an object of beauty and desire.

Thus in a love poem, preserved on Papyrus Harris 500, Ptah of Memphis is appealed to in order to give assistance in the pursuit of a woman (Müller 1899, plates 4 and 5; Lichtheim 1984, 189-90 see also Lichtheim 1980a, 22). Lines 6-9 (Müller 1899, plate 4; Lichtheim 1984, 189, section 5; Figure 34) contain a description of Memphis:

I am going to *nh-t3wy* (Memphis)
 in order to speak to Ptah, the lord of *m3't*
 Give my sister to me tonight!
 The river is as wine
 Ptah is its rushes
 Sakhmet is its foliage
 Iadet its buds
 Nefertem its lotus flowers.....
 Rejoicing, the land grows light in its beauty
Mn-nfr (Memphis) is a bowl of fruit
 placed in the presence of the beautiful of face (epithet for Ptah)

Another poem was written not as a love poem to a person, but instead addresses the city of Memphis using the same conventions and images seen in the love poetry. A state of

agitation, induced by being separated from Memphis and with it Ptah, is vividly described (P. Anastasi IV; Gardiner 1937, 39, no. 8; Caminos 1954, 150-2, no. 8; Figure 35):

Behold, my heart has gone furtively, it hurries to a place which it knows
 It has journeyed downstream
 in order to see *hwt-k3-ptḥ* (Memphis)
 However, if only I could continue to sit quietly, waiting for my heart
 so that it may tell me the condition of *mn-nfr*
 No business has come to completion
 as my heart has leapt from its place
 Come to me Ptah, in order to take me to *mn-nfr*
 May you cause that I may freely see you
 My wish is to spend much time asleep
 but my heart is not in my body
 all my limbs have been overwhelmed by evil
 my eye is weak through looking
 my ear does not hear
 my voice is hoarse
 and all my words are upside down
 Be kind to me, may you cause that I overcome them

The physical distress caused through absence from the familiar locality and its deity are vividly described in the poem above (compare with Guksch 1994). The actual physical effects of being outside Memphis were very similar to the feelings induced in Sinuhe when he was fleeing from Egypt, from the known environment. As has been seen in Chapter 2, an attachment to the immediate locality in Egypt was an accepted and expected aspect to being an Egyptian. The implication of the above poem was that Memphis was almost a paradise, a place in which one could be happy, when outside Memphis the reverse was true. An identification with the city of Memphis was made, nevertheless this could have been understood as implicitly referring to Egypt as well.

This is perhaps suggested by the fluidity in the terms of reference for Memphis, and by the Greek name for Egypt ('Aigytos') which seems to have been derived from *hwt-k3-ptḥ* (Baines and Malek 1992, 134), one of the ancient names for Memphis. There were several further names for the city (for example, *lnbw-ḥd*; *mn-nfr* and *ḥt-t3wy*), which could be used specifically for a certain area of the city or for the city as a whole

(Jeffreys 2001, 373). The city as the country and vice-versa is implied in the ancient Egyptian word for Egypt, *kmt* (more specifically the 'Black land', the floodplain - see Chapter 2) which was written with the city determinative (Cannuyer 1989, 45).

In another highly literary text, but which purported to be a letter between a chantress of Hathor to a chantress of Amun, the idea of Memphis as a paradise is reiterated (P. Sallier IV; Gardiner 1937, 88-92, no 1; Caminos 1954, 333-49, no. 1). The letter was a model letter, of the same type as those seen in Chapter 2, and would have been read and copied by scribes in scribal schools. Its origin may have been in a real letter, and if so gives a rare ostensibly female perspective on the city.

The letter begins with the required wishes of good health, and invokes the many deities of Memphis, including the Syrian gods Ba'al and Qadesh (line 1,6) and the deceased kings of Egypt (line 2,1). Then follows a very lengthy description of Memphis, in which the city was pictured in glowing terms. This section was introduced by the correspondent saying: 'I have approached *mn-nfr*, and I have found *mn-nfr* in a very excellent state' (line 2,3). The riches to be found in Memphis were also listed, which included food, grain, oil, cattle, and weapons (lines 2,4 - 4,7). The people of the city, Egyptian and non-Egyptian alike, were described as happy, for example 'the Asiatics of the city are sitting, confident, embraced' (line 2,8) as were the noble women of the city (line 4,3). Perhaps the description of confident Asiatics was included to emphasise Memphis as a benevolent living environment - *even* non-Egyptians could live happily there. Furthermore, the term 'Asiatics' was also used to refer to slaves (see Baines 1996b, 375-6), if this was the case here, it also serves to reiterate the wonders of Memphis.

An emphatic picture is created of Memphis as a very relaxed environment, in which there were different groups of people, identified on the basis of country of origin,

gender or profession, enjoying life to the full. As much as Book of the Dead 183 and the love poem above, the model letter was seeking to idealise Memphis - not surprisingly the image given was one of a city without comparison. But also in more routine texts, such as a letter complaining that the recipient had been causing trouble with her father, the importance of the immediate locality was emphasised. The deities of Memphis were integrated into the formulaic greetings phrases at the beginning of the letter (P. Bologna; Gardiner 1937, 9, no 13; Caminos 1954. 26-8, no. 13, lines 9,8 - 9,9 and 10,6-10,7). The importance of reverence to, and identification with, the local deities, as opposed to solely invoking deities from outside the local area, is shown by the way in which these formulaic greetings were freely adapted, as seen in Chapter 2 where Theban or Nubian deities could be inserted at the appropriate point.

These texts convey what it could mean to be from Memphis, to live in one of the foremost cities of Egypt. The strongest sense is gained of the utter centrality of the city to thought, emotions and even physical well-being.

The foci of Memphis

The site today is much changed from the New Kingdom, with few visual remnants of the New Kingdom occupation left in situ. Yet it is still possible to look at a landscape which the Memphites would themselves have seen. On the west of the city lie the necropoleis, with the stepped pyramid of Saqqara, and the pyramid fields to the north and south, which would have provided a constant reminder of the past for Memphites. During the New Kingdom, if not attempting to view them from the midst of narrow, crowded streets, these pyramids would have been much more visible than today (Jeffreys 1998), and there would also have been potential to gaze across the Nile, northwards to Heliopolis providing a connection between these two highly significant urban centres (Jeffreys 1998; Figure 32).

The desert sands with their monuments to the dead were not the sole reminders of the power of the Egyptian state. In the midst of the settlement areas were large scale religious and administrative buildings, providing a ceremonial aspect to the city such as that seen in Thebes and Amarna. Here was an area in which the motivations, ideology and belief systems of the 'high elite' were demonstrated in architectural form. The temple was both a 'repository of traditional Egyptian culture and the focus of social solidarity' (Baines 1991, 180).

Great temple complex of Ptah

As seen above, Memphis the city was bound up with the god Ptah: here was his locality, his dwelling on earth, and as such there were a number of temples built for him, but there was also a wide range of devotion to other deities of Egyptian and non-Egyptian origin. Suitably for a city of its importance and size, there were a large number of temples (Bakry 1972), and in the Ramesside period careful planning ensured that new temples to Ptah became the foci of the city (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1987, 12; Malek 1988, 45; Figure 36). The movement of the Nile freed up new land which was also used for new temple structures (Jeffreys and Malek 1988, 28). In this rebuilding material from previous structures was re-used, and it has been shown that Ramesses II's rebuilding of the royal/religious sections of the city had been set in motion during the reign of Seti I (Jeffreys and Smith 1988, 65-6). Archaeological evidence for the temple complexes of Memphis is, in some cases, non-existent. Instead inscriptional evidence, such as devotional stelae, is the sole source of evidence for a temple's existence (Dussaud 1926, 277; Badawy 1948, 27). For example, the location of the temple of Aten, built in Memphis during the reign of Akhenaten, is thought to have been Kom el-Qala'a (Malek 1997, 99) on the basis of textual and prosopographic evidence (Malek 1997, 95-7).

The Egyptian temple demonstrates the importance of architectural boundaries, with each temple separated from its surrounding areas through the use of an enclosure wall. This served both to delineate the sacred space and to exclude those who were not meant to penetrate it. Merenptah described the building of a temple wall for Ptah as an act of devotion in itself (Anthes 1959, 2, plate 9a). This is recorded on a limestone stela, found in the surrounding wall of the great temple complex of Ptah. Part of it reads 'he made (this) as a monument for his father Ptah, making for him the Great Wall of *mry-n-ptḥ-ḥtp-ḥr-m³t* who makes wide the space for Ptah' (Anthes 1959, 5; Sourouzian 1989, 47-8, fig. 14).

For a settlement to be urban, according to Assmann (2001, 27) it had to contain a temple, and this was one of the main features of the city:

'We should recall the castle-like nature of the temples, whose high enclosure walls and pylon towers loomed visibly over the flat land from quite a distance away. In the topography of a settlement, the enormous, dominating character of the temple stood out clearly vis-à-vis all other manifestations of human building activity' (Assmann 2001, 27).

The enclosure wall provided the initial visual impact, an area of sanctity but also of exclusivity. This exclusivity needs to be borne in mind: it was such that even the more accessible temples were unlikely to have been used as the main place for religious activities by 'the archaeologically almost invisible general population' (Baines 2001, 3).

This demarcation of space is seen most clearly where temple remains are still extant above ground, as at Thebes, but the great temple complex of Ptah in Memphis was once similarly as imposing, and was surrounded by smaller temples outside its enclosure wall, reinforcing the sanctity of the area. The course of the Ptolemaic period enclosure wall, which followed the line of earlier period walls, enclosed within it approximately 24,000 square metres and several temples (Petrie 1910, 39; Anthes 1959, 7, 66-7; Anthes 1965, 3; Jeffreys and Smith 1988, 57, 61). Only one area of the temple complex inside the enclosure wall has been excavated in any detail, the West Hall of

Ptah, built by Ramesses II. This comprised a pylon, set into the west side of the enclosure wall, and a hypostyle hall (Petrie 1909a, 5-6).

As at Thebes, the impact of the temple area was emphasised through the careful construction of sacred ways leading up to it, and there were four main entrances into the enclosure, on the east, west, north and south, built by Ramesses II. Evidence for the southern approach was discovered in 1982: 'a stone-paved way, almost certainly the main axial south approach to the Ptah tenemos. This approach was flanked by the two small temples of Ramesses II...and at least two others, with attached installations for purification and libations' (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1984, 25). The sacred way probably led to a gate in the enclosure wall of the great temple complex of Ptah, outside which a colossus of Ramesses II may have been placed.

Colossal statues were a vital element of the temples at Memphis (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1987, 18), and, as elsewhere in Egypt, were placed outside the entrances to temples, in particular in front of the pylons. Outside the pylon of temple A, one of the temples built outside the enclosure wall of the great temple area of Ptah, there were almost twice life size granite statues of Ramesses II (Smith, Jeffreys and Malek 1983, 30-3). The most well-known colossal statue of Ramesses II from Memphis, the Abu el-Hol, was discovered in 1820 (Jeffreys 1985, 24; Plates 6 - 7) to the south of the great temple complex of Ptah, near the south gate, and was originally 44 ft high. Along with another colossal statue of Ramesses II it may have stood outside the main southern entrance to the great temple complex of Ptah.

The Ramesside period re-working of the temple environment served to demonstrate the power of Ramesses II, and Malek (1988, 45) commented that 'such a sweeping approach to urban planning was unusual'. These outside areas of the great temple complex of Ptah would have been the most accessible, hence the need for colossal statues and unequivocal statements (see Simpson 1982 for a discussion of Egyptian

sculpture as propaganda; see also Ammoun 1991, 87; Delacampagne 1991). On the bases of such statues were engraved the names of captive countries, such as Syria (see Petrie 1909a, 10). For those who were able to enter the temple proper, they would have moved through a wealth of such images as the Egyptian world-view was put forward in material form. Thus it was appropriate that those who were able to penetrate furthest into a temple complex were the very people who were behind the formulation of this world-view: 'the conclusion seems inescapable that the principal focus of high culture was the very elites themselves, at whose behest it was created and for whom it was sustained, and the great gods' (Baines and Yoffee 2000, 16).

Religious festivals, an essential aspect to the functioning of a temple, provided an opportunity for more of the populace to access the religious world, to catch a glimpse of the shrines of the deities (but not of the gods themselves). On such occasions, a limited sector of the populace could proceed into the first court of the temple (Stadelmann 1991, 141), whilst others could watch the procession of the barque as the hidden deity was brought out of the temple (Baines 1991, 148; Stadelmann 1991). Middle Kingdom evidence, the Abydos stelae, demonstrate that 'even to attend some festivals was a privilege to which people aspired in perpetuity' (Baines 1991, 149).

Numerous fragments of statuary (Plate 5), and complete statues, have been excavated in the great temple complex of Ptah, and illustrate the high investment in the area throughout the New Kingdom, not only during the Ramesside period (Mariette 1872, plates 27-98; Daressy 1902, 27; Petrie in Engelbach 1915, 32). The alabaster sphinx (Plate 8), notable both for its size and its material, is thought to have been made during the 18th dynasty, but re-used during the Ramesside period (Jeffreys 1985, 21).

A statue of the scribe Amenhotep, an administrator during the reign of Amenhotep III, provides a vivid image of the investment made in this city (Gardiner in Petrie, Wainwright and Gardiner 1913 32-6). It was excavated in the area of the West Hall of

Ptah (not its primary context), and Amenhotep describes the foundation of a temple dedicated to Ptah which he supervised on behalf of Amenhotep III (lines 13-18). The temple and its surroundings were pictured as something amazing (Gardiner in Petrie et al 1913, 34). Gardiner warned against taking this text at face-value: 'there is nothing to show whether the shrine was a large or a small one; Egyptian grandiloquence leaves no room for deductions on such points' (in Petrie et al 1913, 36).

Tracing the religious beliefs of the Memphites

The votive statues and stelae (see Borchardt 1934, 90, no. 1174; Bourriau 1982; Clère 1968, 146; Wild 1979; Schulman 1988) found in and around Memphis' temples dedicated by both royal and non-royal Memphites demonstrate the personal devotion to deities. How far this was actually a genuine act of devotion or a necessary aspect to functioning in Egyptian society is not clear, although for the dedicator of the stela/statue there was probably no dichotomy between the two.

Votive stelae form a central part to the argument for pilgrimage in Egypt (Yoyotte 1960, 22, 45; see section on pilgrimage below) as well as for the rise in the level of personal piety during the 19th dynasty. Any evidence for personal piety was seized upon by Egyptologists in the early twentieth century, as they were eager for any material which showed ancient Egyptian religion as a reflective, self-aware, widely accessed religion, more easily understandable in the terms of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Gunn's seminal article on this topic, he thought that non-Egyptians (Syrians) stimulated the growth of personal religiosity, which is 'the character alike of Semitic religion and of our texts' (1916, 93). By contrast, later interpreters have seen the personal religiosity during the Ramesside period as an innovation of the Amarna period (Assmann 1995, 190). Others have viewed piety (in variant forms) as something which was always present, to a greater or lesser extent, in ancient Egypt (see Baines 2001, 1-2). Given

the random factors controlling the survival of evidence, this seems a reasonable assumption.

It is still necessary to emphasise the narrow range of people who were able to present votive offerings. The state generated and controlled the presentation of offerings (Baines 1991, 179-86; Pinch 1993). For example, in New Kingdom Thebes there may have been workshops attached to, and run by the temples, for the production of votive offerings to Hathor, and a considerable proportion of those donating votive offerings were themselves artisan-priests, therefore still members of an elite (Pinch 1993, 327-333). The deposition of a votive offering involved a series of actions which may have been mediated through a member of the high elite on behalf of the devotee. For example, officials could act as intermediaries (Baines 1991, 183) and statues of officials placed inside the temples could also act as loci for the deposition of votive offerings: the statue owner would then guarantee to pass on the prayers to the deity (Pinch 1993, 332-6).

This tight structure associated with the presentation of votive offerings further restricted the accessibility of such actions, reflecting the structure of Egyptian society. The ritual surrounding votive offerings was dependent upon the status of an individual in society, making the deposition of offerings an act which demonstrated personal status. Thus women were able to visit the temple because of their relationship to a male member of the elite, further underlining the centrality of status (Pinch 1993, 348). Even these visitors to temples would, in the vast majority of cases, have penetrated only as far as the open forecourt, which was where they were able to leave their votive offerings, in a ritual which could be accompanied by prayer and/or sacrifice (Pinch 1993, 332-48). Hence the deposition of offerings as found in an excavation frequently does not represent the primary site of deposition as offerings were moved by the priests, taken on into the inner parts of the temple, and later buried within the sacred area of the temple (for example the Karnak cachette, Wilkinson 2000, 64). It is therefore not

possible to deduce from the find spot of a votive offering that the person who made that offering had been able to deposit it in that location.

One of the major characteristics amongst votive offerings from Memphis is in the dedications to non-Egyptian deities. The introduction of non-Egyptian deities seems to have been the initiative of Amenophis II, and thus had an official basis (Simpson 1960, 65), consistent with perceptions about how 'high culture' was generated in ancient Egypt (Baines and Yoffee 2000). A stela found at Mit Rahineh relates the conquests of Amenophis II, a similar version of which was found in the Karnak temple at Thebes (Drioton 1947, 61). The stela is immediately linked with Memphis through the identification of Amenophis with 'Amun Re who lives in Perunefer' (Badawy 1943, 3). Perunefer was one of the port areas in Memphis (see below). The text vividly describes Amenophis' victories in Syria, in which he 'crossed the River Orontes, over the waters, with violence like Reshep' (Drioton 1947, 61; Fulco 1976, 3-4). A Canaanite god was thus seen as a valid point of comparison for an Egyptian king, and Reshep was a god who was 'never assimilated, as the iconographic details of his dress and equipment and his constant association with other Asiatic deities make clear' (Simpson 1960, 72).

An identification with a Canaanite god in the midst of a text discussing conquests in Syria-Palestine seems an anomaly, but is also appropriate - when abroad the king could take on the qualities of the local gods, and conquer its people with the skills of their gods. At the same time, it makes a stark contrast to the description of Amenophis' return to Memphis which drew upon formulaic phrases in order to illustrate the glory of his conquests: 'his person approached the town of Memphis, his heart avenged with every foreign land, all lands being under his sandals' (Badawy 1943; Drioton 1947, 57). This apparent distaste for all places non-Egyptian appears to be contradicted by Reshep being assumed as a personal god for a king, and has been explained as motivated by the military 'credentials' of this warlike god (Fulco 1976, 31). Reshep as a personal god for the king may, however, have also represented a form of conquest

in itself - even the gods of foreign lands were not free from being taken over by an Egyptian king.

The sphinx stela, from Giza, part of the sacred landscape of the Memphite area, shows Reshep, and a Syrian goddess, Astarte, fully integrated into Amenophis II's belief system (Helck 1962, 489). Amenophis related how when he was regent he was told to look after the king's horses. When he did this, he noted how 'Reshep and Astarte rejoiced over him because he did everything that his heart desired' (Zivie 1976, 64-9, line 23). The setting of the sphinx stela, on the northeastern side of the sphinx in the heart of Giza and the content of the text, a celebration of the physical prowess of Amenophis II, demonstrate the integration of these non-Egyptian deities into one of the most historic landscapes for the ancient Egyptian.

Despite this integration of non-Egyptian deities into the Egyptian pantheon, it has been argued that any temples to non-Egyptian deities were served by non-Egyptian priests (see Kamish 1985, 20). This is on the basis of two pieces of inconclusive evidence. The first is a grain record from the reign of Amenophis II which mentions diplomatic messengers from cities in Syro-Palestine, as well as people from the temple of Ba'al (Kamish 1985, 20). Secondly, the rank and names of an individual buried in Saqqara have been used to argue his non-Egyptian origins (Helck 1962, 482; Stadelmann 1967, 34). He was a priest of Amun of Perunefer (see below), and a priest of Ba'al and Astarte during the 18th dynasty. Kamish (1990, 42) concluded that he may have been born in Egypt of non-Egyptian parents, and his priestly titles, which were Egyptian, may demonstrate that the worship of Ba'al and Astarte was conducted along Egyptian lines.

Following the reign of Amenophis II, Reshep appears to have been afforded devotion outside the royal circle as well (Givon 1980, 144), although it may not have been until the 19th dynasty that he became a *Volksgott* (Helck 1962, 488). This may have been

stimulated by the return of Egyptian officials from service in Syria-Palestine where they had worshipped non-Egyptian deities (Leclant 1960, 4; Cornelius 1994, 2) as well as by non-Egyptian sailors and merchants travelling to and from Memphis. Reshep appeared on non-royal votive stelae, one of which was discovered during Petrie's excavations in the west hall of Ptah (Petrie 1910, 39, plate XXXIX; Leibovitch 1940, 490; Stadelmann 1967, 68; Fulco 1976, 11; Stewart 1976, 44). On this small stela, an individual is shown kneeling before Reshep, who is holding a mace in his right hand (Petrie 1910, plate XXIX; Fulco 1976, 11). Few of the votive stelae have a specific provenance: stela Cairo 2792 also shows an individual before Reshep, who is greeted as 'the great god, the lord of the sky' (Fulco 1976, 8-9), but it is only a conjecture that this stela is from Memphis.

Astarte, a Syrian goddess, was also a source of devotion for Memphites during the nineteenth dynasty and had a number of cult temples within the city (Badawy 1948, 23; Helck 1966, 1-2; Martin 1992, 29). She was directly linked with Perunefer on an inscription of Amenophis II at Tura (Daressy 1911, 258), and came to be worshipped by non-royal individuals as well. A nineteenth dynasty votive stela shows a man and a woman with their son carrying an offering to Astarte (Koeffoed-Petersen 1948, 35-6; plate 44). The text identifies Astarte specifically as a Syrian goddess, calling her 'mistress of the sky', and the 'queen of the two lands'. Astarte could also be linked with Egyptian goddesses, for example she was shown in a headdress similar to those worn by Hathor on a fragment of a stela dating to the reign of Merenptah (Petrie 1909a, 8, pl XV; Leclant 1960, 11-3).

It is not possible to typify a devotion to non-Egyptian deities as an activity of any non-Egyptian Memphite community. Nor is it possible to speculate about the number or location of any non-Egyptian Memphites on the basis of the location of temples devoted to non-Egyptian deities, when such deities were part of Egyptian life. An incorporation of non-Egyptian deities into the religious life of Memphis seems to have been achieved

without undermining the ideological statements of the elite concerning non-Egyptians, precisely because this was a product of elite action. And, as with other non-Egyptians who became part of the Egyptian state, the non-Egyptian deities were benefitting elite Egyptian life and could thus be successfully absorbed into the Egyptian religious system.

Alongside the multiplicity of other religious allegiances present in Memphis, was an ever-present devotion to Ptah. Under the floor of the West Hall of Ptah were found a number of stelae dedicated to Ptah, in a secondary context as they had been thrown away (Petrie 1909a, 7-8; Petrie in Engelbach 1915, 33). A large number of such stelae were 'ear stelae', on which any number of ears could be inscribed without any further information (for example, see Petrie 1909a, plate XIII; Figure 37). Some of the ear stelae also depicted the owner of the stela and could include inscriptions (see Koenig 1994, 119-21). One of the stelae discovered by Petrie depicted 376 ears beneath which was the owner kneeling with his arms raised in supplication (Petrie 1909a, 7, plate IX, no. 49, plate XIII).

What the deposition of the ear stelae meant to the ancient Egyptians, and what response from the deities was expected, is not certain. Yet it has been convincingly argued that the ear stelae did not represent the desire for a sick ear to be cured, rather the ears depicted were those of the deities, and the large number of ears was an attempt to increase the likelihood of a deity listening to the suppliant (Holden 1982, 296; see Pinch 1993, 247-264).

Both within the great temple complex of Ptah, and under the floor level of the palace of Merenptah, situated outside the great temple complex of Ptah, on the south east side, were found a large number of stelae in a secondary context. These included round topped stelae, depicting the mummiform Ptah facing another god, *nḥl*, who was shown as a bird, with a uraeus serpent and a sun disk on its head (Schulman 1964, 275-6).

Alongside stelae devoted to Ptah, was one which has been interpreted as dedicated to the cult of the living Ramesses III. This is an inscribed limestone stela (Schulman 1963, plate VII, 177-84), in a very damaged state.

From his analysis of the stelae found during the University of Pennsylvania excavations, within the great temple complex and in the palace of Merenptah, Schulman was able to build up a picture of the type of people who participated in the donation of votive offerings. As suggested by the work of Pinch with reference to donations to Hathor, in Memphis the donors appear to have been from the 'middle or upper middle levels of society' (Schulman 1967, 154). The majority were members of the temple administration 'from the lesser priesthoods', and the 'skilled artisan class' (Schulman 1967, 154).

The excitement generated in Gunn's article in the attempt to access the religious beliefs and actions of the non-elite is reflected in Schulman's initial interpretation of a large number of apparently votive offerings. These were deposited in a fragmented state, having been cut out of wall reliefs of the temples and palace of Merenptah (Schulman 1967, 154-6). Due to the way in which these offerings had been obtained, Schulman thought that they must date to after the end of the 19th dynasty, when it would no longer have been considered sacrilegious to act in this way, and he also concluded, 'it is rather ironic that here the usurpation and reuse of royal material was carried out not by the highest of the high, the king, but rather by the lowest of the lows, the pious but very poor members of Egyptian society' (1967, 156). These objects have since been understood to date from the Third Intermediate Period, from private houses built in the area, and thus may have formed part of a domestic cult, rather than the actions of the 'lowest of the low' within a formal, sacred context (Schulman 1988, 88). This change of emphasis demonstrates well the caution must be taken with such evidence, especially given the eagerness of some to uncover the beliefs of those who are least likely to be recoverable in the archaeological record.

Similar expectations that an insight into the religious beliefs of the non-elite of Memphis was possible were raised by the discovery of a small temple of Ptah, built by Ramesses II (Anthes 1957; 1965). This was located near the great temple complex of Ptah, 250 metres south of the West Hall of Ptah. It consisted of four elements: court, sanctuary, pylon and an enclosure wall. It may initially have been built as a private chapel for the king (Anthes 1965, 6). With time, the use of the building seems to have changed. It was still in use during the reign of Seti II when it may have become a more accessible location. This has been surmised on the basis of the location of votive offerings, found inside as well as in front of the sanctuary (Anthes 1957, 8; Anthes 1965, 4). These offerings included figurines of the goddess Tawret (Anthes 1965, 4, catalogue numbers 5-8), and it was objects such as these, according to Anthes, which 'proved the Sanctuary to be the place in which the common man prayed to Ptah' (Anthes 1965, 4).

In the sanctuary was also found a libation basin (Figure 38), which demonstrates both how the temple areas could be approached for prayer, and how it was possible for the elite to identify with, and express loyalty to, Memphis as a city (Anthes 1959; 1965, 72-8). The rectangular limestone basin was dedicated to Ptah by Amenemhat, scribe of the dockyard (Jacquet 1958, 161; Wall-Gordon 1958, 174). A kneeling statue of Amenemhat would have originally been attached to the basin (Wall-Gordon 1958, 168). The whole basin was highly decorated, with a depiction of the walls and towers which would have surrounded the great temple complex of Ptah (Jacquet 1958, 163; Anthes 1965, 73-4, plates 24-5; O'Connor and Silverman 1979, 32). The towers resemble the 'Syrian' gate at Medinet Habu (Jacquet 1958, 163; Wall-Gordon 1958, 173). Onto the raised relief of the wall and the towers, were carved, in sunk relief, a series of ears and prayers to Ptah. Wall-Gordon (1958, 168) emphasised the careful composition of the decoration of the basin: the texts face away from the statue of Amenemhat, and the ears are orientated to look as if they are able to catch the words.

The text itself consists of a series of statements praising Ptah. Two are particularly relevant in this context. In one, Amenemhat speaks about Memphis as a place: 'Praise to you in *hwt-k3-ptḥ* (Memphis), the most noble of all cities' (Wall-Gordon 1958, 170; Anthes 1965, 73). This formulaic epithet reiterates the theme of Memphis as an unsurpassable city, seen in the texts discussed above.

The second statement deals with the question of the accessibility of the temple complexes for the actual Memphite population. Amenemhet says: 'Praise to you at the great wall, it is the place where prayers are heard' (Wall-Gordon 1958, 170; Anthes 1965, 73). The wall of the temple as a place to pray has inevitably led to comparisons with practices at the Western Wall in Jerusalem (see for example, Wall-Gordon 1958, 175). Anthes explained this practice by noting that the wall of the temple was more accessible as a place to pray than any other part of the temple (1959, 7). That this motif was not limited to the libation basin is shown by a number of other votive offerings found in the temple's locality which were themselves in the form of towers/gateways, with little or no inscription, except for ears in sunk relief (for example, see Anthes 1965, 77-8, plate 25d).

The discovery of a chapel from the time of Seti I, situated against the enclosure wall, further demonstrates the use of the enclosure wall as a focus of devotion (Perkins 1949, 41, plate IXa). The chapel had within it three seated statues, which were initially identified as Ptah, Isis and Nephthys (Perkins 1949, 41). This identification was shown by Berlandini (1984) to be false. Both the goddesses had a crown of a highly unusual type, which Berlandini identified as the tower, seen, for example, in the votive offerings mentioned above (1984, 32-3). One of the goddesses, with the complete crown, is *tsmt*, the personification of the tower (Berlandini 1984, 34-7). *tsmt* is rarely encountered in Memphis (Berlandini 1984, 37). The other goddess, with the incomplete crown, was identified as *mn-nfr* (Memphis), on the basis of the traces of her

name on the statue (Berlandini 1984, 38). Thus Memphis was revered, not only as the location for its major deity, Ptah, but also as a deity in its own right.

That narrow, locally based religious devotion could co-exist alongside respect for deities from outside Memphis is epitomised by the Ramesside temple of Hathor (El-Sayed Mahmud 1978). In this temple, Hathor was represented in two different and distinct ways. She was shown as the Memphite Hathor and as the Heliopolitan Hathor, and the temple seems to have originally been dedicated to the Heliopolitan Hathor alone, with the Memphite Hathor added later. These two goddesses highlight the links between these two urban centres. The epithet of the Memphite Hathor (*nbt nht rsyt* - 'mistress of the southern sycamore') seems to imply that she was associated with a distinct part of the city (El-Sayed Mahmud 1978, 15). This may have been a newly built area (El-Sayed Mahmud 1978, 15).

The sacred environment

The sacred areas of the city encapsulated an ideal world which seems to have been open to the possibility of divine assistance from non-Egyptian deities. This was despite the concept of a temple as a divine cosmos, a place in which the Egyptians cast aside forces of disorder, such as non-Egyptians. Hence the endlessly repeated image of the king smiting non-Egyptians, twisting them by their hair, their faces, in some cases, shown in full-frontal view instead of the side aspect reserved for Egyptians seen in temples, most notably on the pylons.

The whole sacred area was adapted and re-built throughout the New Kingdom, with the Memphites themselves having an informal impact on building use during the latter part of the Ramesside period and later, as seen in the temple of Ramesses II. Even for a literate member of Egyptian society, the scribe of the dockyard Amenemhat, the wall of the great temple complex of Ptah seems to have been a primary source of devotion,

demonstrating the limited access to the more sacred areas inside the complex. For many in the city, the temples would have been a fixed and dramatic point in the landscape, but a point which few could access on a regular basis.

Royal residences

Adjoining the great temple complex of Ptah and those temples in close proximity to it, were the residences of the royal family, suitably situated so as to be part of the sacred/ceremonial complex of the city. During the Amarna period, this relationship was crystallised in the window of appearances, a direct link between the palace and the first court of the temple: 'the role of the palace in the new city became that of mediation between man and god and is symbolized in the image of the "window of appearances" where the king rewarded his courtiers' (Mallinson 1999, 78). As at Amarna, where the palaces were themselves places of symbolism and religious ritual, with Akhenaten moving between them in a symbolic procession (Lacovara 1999, 64-7), some of the palaces in other royal cities may only have been lived in for very short periods of time by the king, if at all - he may just have visited them. For example, Ramesses III's palace at Medinet Habu adjoins the first court of the temple, linked by a window of appearances, but may only have been lived in rarely by the king.

In Memphis, archaeologists have speculated about possible sites for any royal palaces. For example, Anthes, having discovered the small temple of Ramesses II (see above), then wondered whether Ramesses II had built a palace adjacent (1965, 6). The only royal palace to have been excavated in Memphis is that of Merenptah. This is located on the south east side of the Ptah enclosure, in Kom el Qala'a, and was itself only partially excavated, on its eastern side (Figure 39). It may have been connected directly via a royal road to the Ptah enclosure (Jeffreys and Smith 1988, 65-6), as the northward axis of the palace, if extended, leads to a colossus of Ramesses II outside the eastern gate. The excavation reports have never been fully published, but an idea of the

palace may be gained from the initial descriptions and reconstructions published in the *Pennsylvania Museum Journal*. Blocks from the palace continue to be found (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1986, 10-11).

Merenptah's palace was just one of a number of building works carried out by the king in Memphis (see Sourouzian 1989, 33-9). Merenptah's links with the city were immortalised in the Israel stela, which also sets the political context:

'et ceci montre en tout cas l'importance de la ville de Memphis sous le règne de Merenptah. La ville était un point stratégique pendant les campagnes, c'est Merenptah qui lui "a ouvert les portes" et "fait que ses temples reçoivent des offrandes" (stèle d'Israel, ligne 3), après la menace de l'attaque ennemi. Et les inscriptions ajoutées par Merenptah sur les monuments memphites montrent assez le soin qu'a pris Merenptah de faire perpétuer sa victoire et réinstaurer le pouvoir royal, illustré par les scènes de massacre des ennemis' (Sourouzian 1989, 53).

It has been emphasised that the royal palace was not only a place in which the king lived and administered his domain, but that it was also a sacred locale, much as a temple (O'Connor 1995, 268). Its architectural form, as with temples, provided a reflection of the cosmos (O'Connor 1995, 290-2).

The palace itself was a mud brick structure, of over 300 square metres, adjoining a temple of Merenptah (see Jeffreys 1985, 19-21; Sourouzian 1989, 39-41), and was probably intended only to house the king for short visits (O'Connor and Silverman 1979, 25). The eastern wing of the palace consisted of a large open court, with rows of columns on all sides (Fisher 1917, 213; see plans in O'Connor 1995, 399, figs 7.6, 7.7), opening out into sets of official apartments. Wall decoration was an essential element to the impact of the palace. In this court, the reliefs showed Merenptah worshipping Ptah, showing the necessary devotion to Memphis' god (his relationship with Ptah crystallised in his name - 'beloved of Ptah').

Rapoport's analysis of the different factors contributing to the ideological messages of the Egyptian palace is appropriate for Merenptah's palace. Inevitably, it was constructed to provide a potent reiteration of Egypt's supremacy (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1986,

10-11). This is particularly demonstrated by the throne room (Fisher 1917; 1924), itself an encapsulation of the official world-view during the New Kingdom. This was where Merenptah would have received diplomatic visitors and courtiers, and it was decorated with the aim to impress, fulfilling the stylistic conventions expected for such a space. Furthermore, as interpreted by O'Connor (1995, 292) the throne room was imbued with cosmological significance: 'the king on his throne is the sun-god in his horizon'.

At the centre of the room was a dais for the throne. On each of the four sides, was a panel with a depiction of a bound captive. Surrounding the panels was a border formed by the hieroglyphs reading 'all peoples'. To approach the throne any visitors had to climb a ramp, on which were further images of bound captives 'representing in all the ten races which Merenptah claimed to have subdued during his reign' (Fisher 1917, 218). This epitomises the attitude to non-Egyptians: some of those approaching Merenptah on his throne would have been from outside Egypt, and their subject position (real or not) was thus made explicit. Non-Egyptians had to be walked over in order to reach the king. But an analagous situation would have existed for Egyptians travelling to royal palaces beyond Egypt.

A more public place in which Merenptah could have been viewed by some of his subjects is suggested by details in reliefs found in the palace. These show a balcony, which presumably functioned as a 'window of appearances' (Fisher 1917, 222), a place where the pharaoh could be hailed as well as somewhere from where he could gaze upon his loyal subjects. Fisher suggested that it was also from here that Merenptah was able to look upon the booty from conquests abroad, which included prisoners (1917, 222).

Memphis, as a city at the very core of Egyptian self-perception, suitably conveyed a self-assured image of wealth, power, and religious devotion through its sacred and

ceremonial areas. The few sites excavated within Memphis give a hint of the great extent of these complexes during the New Kingdom, as do the material finds. For the prisoner being paraded in front of Merenptah in the palace, as well as for the majority of Memphites gaining a rare glance of royal/religious ritual, a feeling of awe, and fear (at least in the case of the prisoner) would have been generated.

In the following sections, some non-royal/religious aspects of the city are investigated, to see how these essentially contrasting worlds existed and impacted on one another. These religious/royal complexes appear to epitomise the views of literate society where 'there is a bland elite presentation of one side of the truth' (Baines 1987, 84).

Harbour areas

No archaeological evidence directly relating to the harbour areas at Memphis has been discovered, yet it is accepted that Memphis was a city which depended on its ports, as did other settlements in Egypt (Kemp and O'Connor 1974, 102). The ports at Memphis were a location for formal action directed by the state, for example, the military expeditions to Syro-Palestine were launched from the harbours (see Stadelmann 1967, 127) as well as more informal action, such as the buying and selling of market goods.

There were three main terms for port in ancient Egypt, and these could relate to informal as well as more formal arrangements: *mryt*, *mniwt* and *whryt*. The harbour of Amenhotep III at western Thebes represents one end of the scale. It was associated with his mortuary temple and palace and was a vast artificial harbour basin, with its size not entirely dictated by functionality: 'the size of the Birket Habu, and the ambition shown in the associated temple, palace and urban development, must be seen also as an expression of this essentially ideological effort' (Kemp and O'Connor 1974, 134). Yet

harbours associated with royal cities did not always need to be such statements, as seen by the jetties at Amarna (Kemp and O'Connor 1974, 103).

Riverbank and harbour areas in ancient Egypt can also be assessed as potential loci for action outside the main parameters of the state. The riverbank was a location for many different levels of activity and interaction between populations, and as a trading area is well attested in ancient Egyptian sources (Janssen 1975, 510). It has been viewed not only as an area within which non-Egyptians lived and worked, but also as an area in which women were allowed to function beyond their immediate household (Eyre 1998, 173). Thus Eyre has argued, from the evidence presented by the tomb of Ipuy and the tomb of Kenamun at Deir el Medina, that women traded in perishable goods on the riverbank (1998, 176-7). In a sense, therefore, the riverbank could be viewed as a subversive location, an area in which the state and temple economies were by-passed, and where non-Egyptians, as well as Egyptian women and men could interact on a commercial basis, but Eyre stated that such transactions formed the basis of the Egyptian economy, not a mere side-line (1998, 185). The river-bank could be the setting for informal and more formalised trade, and has been seen as the natural setting for such activities, with the Nile the main means of communication and travel within Egypt (Bickel 1998, 167).

A whole set of identities and loyalties may have been generated amongst those who worked on the Nile and beyond on the sea (Bickel 1998, 157, 164-9). The captains of the ships which traded between Egypt and the Near East could be non-Egyptian, as seen in the *Tale of Wenamun*, set in the twenty-first dynasty. Here, Wenamun was taken to Byblos in an Egyptian boat run by Syrians - both the captain and the crew were labelled as Syrian (see Spens 1998, 112), a fact which increased Wenamun's confusion. As an Upper Egyptian, he was used only to Nile traffic, and not to sea travel beyond Egypt, which was dominated by non-Egyptians (Spens 1998, 112).

This may have reflected a known situation in Egypt, for example, there were boat captains with non-Egyptian names, although there are many problems with this type of evidence (Kitchen 1979, 207, no. 370; Spens 1998, 112). The actual merchants who benefitted from the sea trade between Egypt and other countries formed a distinct group, a kind of middle class, according to Bickel (1998, 169). Such people were among the few in Egypt who travelled beyond its borders, experiencing a non-Egyptian world, and one of the points of departure would have been the ports at Memphis. This experience would also have been extended to those who were working in the army, creating and maintaining Egypt's empire. Bickel (1998, 171) emphasised that travel to non-Egyptian localities was a purely functional activity: 'Partir en voyage de son propre gré, par curiosité, est considéré comme une deviance sociale'.

With reference to Memphis, therefore, the harbour areas may have been a major potential site for interaction between widely differing groups of people. These areas of the city have aroused much interest, and much of the research into them has been influenced by the desire to find a non-Egyptian area of the New Kingdom city, such as is known from Graeco-Roman textual evidence. In this the driving expectation has been that the port districts would have been the most likely location for non-Egyptians to live and work in. Not only is this paralleled by Graeco-Roman Memphis, but it is also influenced by the acceptance that, within the modern era, port cities such as Marseilles have formed an area for 'foreign populations' (see Hertmans 2001). Thus much of the discussion concerning the port areas of Memphis revolves around the question of the identity of the inhabitants, as is seen below.

Perunefer

Memphis during the New Kingdom was much more of a river based city than is apparent today. Over the past millennia the Nile has moved steadily eastwards (Smith, Jeffreys and Malek 1983, 40; Jeffreys 1985, 48-55), so that in the New Kingdom it

was a 'riverine city' (Jeffreys and Smith 1988, 59). When discussing the evidence for the port areas of Memphis below, I look primarily at the location Perunefer as an example of a port area (names of other port areas in Memphis are well known from textual sources, for example the port of *hry-nfr* operated during Seti I's reign). Perunefer is primarily known from votive stelae, such as those mentioned above, but unlocated archaeologically (Cabrol 2000, 234).

There are still those who dispute that Perunefer was located in Memphis. This disagreement is based upon an assumption of which was the most probable location for a large number of non-Egyptians. Therefore, for Bietak, the excavator of Tell el Dab'a, his site is the location for Perunefer. The extensive evidence found at Tell el Dab'a for allegedly non-Egyptian activity, in particular the non-Egyptian pottery, was felt to be indicative of wide-spread trading between Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean, based at Tell el Dab'a. Thus the Syro-Palestinian deities identified with Perunefer (see above) were in fact located at Tell el Dab'a: 'Peru-nefer ("*bon voyage*"), le fameux port et chantier naval de la XVIIIe dynastie, ne se trouvait pas à Memphis comme on le croyait, mais à Tell el Dab'a. Cette hypothèse expliquerait la présence à peru-nefer de cultes cananéens, longtemps en vigueur dans l'ancienne Avaris' (Bietak 1999, 48).

There are flaws in Bietak's argument. The first he acknowledged himself, which is the utter lack of evidence, although he confidently wrote that such evidence may still be forthcoming (1999, 48). Secondly, the potential for Syro-Palestinian cults to flourish outside Tell el Dab'a seems to have been implicitly dismissed, despite evidence to the contrary.

The assessment that Perunefer was in Memphis has a long history of careful investigation behind it. An inscribed block of stone was excavated in Bubastis, with Amenophis II making offerings to 'Amun who dwells in Perunefer', thus Perunefer was originally associated with Bubastis (Naville 1891, 30). The Delta remained a

general location for Perunefer, which was initially linked with non-Egyptian deities (the crucial factor in Bietak's analysis of it as a port of Tell el Dab'a) through a stela of Amenophis II worshipping Astarte 'in Perunefer' found at Tura (Daressy 1911, 258; Gauthier 1929, 141).

Gradually, through the analysis of further textual evidence, it was generally agreed that Perunefer was a part of Memphis (Säve-Söderbergh 1946, 38-9; Kamish 1986, 31), but the actual location of the port within Memphis is still uncertain (Jeffreys 1985, 48; Jeffreys and Smith 1988, 61). Critical in this process was the publication, by Glanville (1931; 1932a), of a papyrus (P BM 10056) from the time of Tuthmosis III. The subject matter of this papyrus was the daily business of Perunefer, described as a royal dockyard. It seems to have fallen out of use by the end of the 18th dynasty, as the name no longer appears in texts after this period (Säve-Söderbergh 1946, 38; Jeffreys 1985, 48). This apparent abandonment may have been due to the silting up of the harbour (Jeffreys and Smith 1988, 61; Jeffreys 1996, 293).

An idea of what Perunefer looked like is provided by the suggestion, based upon P.BM 10056, that the dockyard/harbour areas were located on an island in a lake (Wall-Gordon 1958, 174). Perunefer may be compared to Birket Habu (Kemp and O'Connor 1974, 106), a similarly huge port, directly sponsored by royalty and concerned primarily with state business. Certainly, at Memphis during this period there was a great deal of trade and business which could have been operated from Perunefer, so much so that it has been called 'the major provisioning centre for the auxiliary fleets backing up the ambitious Asiatic campaigns of this time' (Jeffreys 1985, 48). Tomb reliefs in the Saqqara necropolis as well as the Papyrus Anastasi have been used to argue that there was a sizeable weapon manufacturing industry based in Memphis (Sauneron 1954, 9-12), and such weapons were loaded onto the ships setting out for war in a port like Perunefer. A substantial proportion of the Memphite population would have been engaged in working in and around the ports, providing the means to

maintain the Egyptian state and empire. The 'dockyard papyrus' (P BM 10056) lists the names of those working in the shipyards and this has been used to show that non-Egyptians do not need to be associated with this type of work (Kamish 1985, 19-20).

The conviction that Perunefer was predominately a non-Egyptian place of work and settlement, a place in which non-Egyptians could worship their own deities, has a long history. When Petrie excavated at Memphis he searched for any evidence for non-Egyptian activity, arguing that: 'it is to be expected that the foreign quarters be along the east side nearest the river, as commerce was their purpose' (1909a, 4). Any finds of a non-Egyptian origin were interpreted as being indicative of a non-Egyptian owner. Petrie's deductions about the location of a non-Egyptian settlement area within Memphis were based upon finds of Greek pottery (from the eighth century onwards) in Kom el Qala'a (on the eastern side of Memphis, near the river) which included pottery heads of foreigners (1909a, 3, 4, 15-7).

Inevitably, given Petrie's interests, he was much excited by these finds (1909a, 15-7). In the excavation report, the Greek pottery was at first only suggestive of a foreign settlement at Kom el Qala'a (1909a, 3) but in the rest of the report Kom el Qala'a was definitively referred to as the 'foreign settlement' (see 1909a, 4). The equation between the pottery heads and living population was crudely made; for example, Petrie surmised that most of the non-Egyptians were men as the majority of non-Egyptian figures were male (1909a, 16). Yet these finds are still considered significant in the reconstruction of Memphis, with non-New Kingdom finds linked to New Kingdom settlement patterns:

'the discovery over the years of non-Egyptian (Phoenician, Persian, Archaic Greek) artifacts in this area, and quantities of ceramic heads of foreigners at Kom el-Qala to the south, may signify the whereabouts of the earlier (New Kingdom) port of Perunefer, which attracted the city's ethnic minorities' (Jeffreys 1999, 490).

It has already been seen that devotion to non-Egyptian deities in an Egyptian city does not need to signify a non-Egyptian population, with the Egyptian king the foremost

amongst the devotees and influencing other Egyptians in their devotion to non-Egyptian deities. Yet ceramic finds of a non-Egyptian origin or appearance have regularly been associated with a non-Egyptian owner (see Bourriau 1981a, 121), an approach which is hard to substantiate. In Memphis, moreover, much of the archaeological material found in the eastern areas of the site dates from periods later than the New Kingdom (Jeffreys 1988, 3), and, that aside, it is not possible to provide a direct linkage between non-Egyptian ceramic finds and the presence of non-Egyptians (Bourriau 1981a, 72).

The importance of context in understanding the purpose and ownership of a ceramic vessel has instead been emphasised, so that simplistic links are avoided. For example, large quantities of Pan-grave ware have been found in Egypt (see for example Bourriau and Quirke 1998, 62, 71-2), and at Memphis, dating to the Second Intermediate Period and early New Kingdom. It has been shown that, when found in graves of a Nubian character, the Pan grave pottery is indicative of a Pan grave community, but when found in town strata, it is not (Bourriau 1981b, 28). Furthermore, due to advances in the analysis of pottery fabrics (see Bourriau, Smith and Nicholson 2000; McGovern 2000), it is possible to try to differentiate between pottery made outside Memphis, or beyond the Nile Valley, and pottery made in the Nile Valley to imitate non-Egyptian styles and forms. For example, the Mycenaean pottery found at Memphis and elsewhere in Egypt may actually have been made in Palestine (Nordström and Bourriau 1993, 183). Similar conclusions have been reached about ivories with Egyptian iconography found outside Egypt (Lilyquist 1998, 29).

In Memphis, much of the non-Egyptian New Kingdom pottery found can be linked directly to trade, hence the centrality of a harbour like Perunefer to the movement and distribution of non-Egyptian goods. For example, at Kom el Rabi'a (see below), many sherds of Canaanite jars have been excavated (Bourriau 1990; Nordström and Bourriau 1993, 185-6); the jars were used to convey important commodities such as oil (Serpico

1999, 271), and were re-used. This process of (re-)distribution via palace officials, as well as directly in harbour areas, was described by Bourriau (1981a, 121).

Hence, what these non-Egyptian ceramic finds do seem to indicate is the thriving trade networks operating from and within Memphis. Trade has been identified as one of the major motivating factors behind the expansion of Egypt in the New Kingdom, with certain items from outside Egypt of central importance for the Egyptian state. Incense has been singled out as one such item, used within temple ritual and in non-state contexts as well (Serpico and White 2000, 889-90). One of the sources for incense resin was Syro-Palestine. With reference to Amarna, over 100 fragments of Canaanite jars were found with traces of incense resin on them (Serpico and White 2000) - that trade routes were open and active during the Amarna period, allegedly an epoch of imperial decline, draws into question either the notion of imperial decline or of the necessity of an empire to keep trade routes open. Further items from Syro-Palestine in regular use in Memphis included olive oil, wood and wine (Nordström and Bourriau 1993, 185), and there was also a human trade, often as trophies of war (Smyth 1998, 14). Likewise, from ports such as Perunefer, Egyptian products were dispatched to the Mediterranean world (Padró 1998, 41-2).

It is not hard to see that Perunefer, as an example of a port area in Memphis, played an essential role in Memphite life, and in the workings of the state. The purpose of the port required that a wide variety of people passed through it, as well as worked in its midst. It was also a site for religious devotion in the city, with a number of deities directly associated with the area, especially non-Egyptian (although not exclusively). The area does not need to be designated as a non-Egyptian district. As has been seen, non-Egyptian finds relate to trade and consumption, not only to a supposed concentration of non-Egyptians. The consumption of non-Egyptian goods, the desire to worship non-Egyptian deities and the reality of working with and alongside non-Egyptians in Memphis, appears to preclude the rigid definition and separation of

Egyptian/non-Egyptian in port areas of Memphis. As seen above, both Amun and Astarte could dwell in Perunefer.

The river bank areas at Memphis were not just places in which official business, trade and the general needs of war were attended to. These areas have also been identified as suitable locations for farming, with opportunities created through the new land made by the movement of the river, as well as for housing in areas where the land was too new for agriculture (Jeffreys 1996, 293-4). Jeffreys summarized his argument thus:

‘as a means of housing ethnic minorities the potential of islands, possibly with locally uncontested farming rights and property boundaries, would also have been important, and in a sense the gradual physical merging of island suburb with west bank metropolis may have helped the integration of a foreign minority to the indigenous population’ (1996, 294).

Dictating the description of the river bank areas in Memphis is the presumption that non-Egyptians would have been housed separately from Egyptians, which implies that a cohesiveness and assimilation possible in the temples was not possible in the rest of Memphis. Doubtless the situation depended very much on the ‘type’ of non-Egyptians (see Chapter 2): if they were prisoners, slaves or mercenaries then they may have been housed ‘en masse’, perceived as different to the rest of the population. Whereas, for wealthy non-Egyptian merchants or priests it may have been possible to reside alongside their Egyptian counterparts, with any non-Egyptian origin of little relevance.

Kom el Rabi’a

The only settlement area in Memphis to have undergone modern excavation techniques is a section of a small residential and working district, the site of RAT in Kom el Rabi’a. This is located outside the great enclosure wall of Ptah (Figure 40), and is 500 square metres in size (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1986, 4; Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1987, figure 1). The motivation for excavating in this area was to ‘investigate the ancient slope and possible southward extension of the associated feature, and thereby to test the theory that the New Kingdom and earlier levels sloped down here to the east,

perhaps to an ancient river front' (Giddy1999b, 1). The site also illustrates links between temple and residential areas, the working lives and beliefs of the occupants, and the ways in which residential and working space was negotiated and defined. Its physical proximity to the great temple complex of Ptah underlines the probability that the residents' lives were defined with reference to this official space. As Kemp has emphasised (1972, 657, 659, 661, 675) temples in Egypt were not only significant in terms of their immense physical impact on the built environment but also as centres of economic life and government administration.

RAT was essentially a New Kingdom area of settlement, from which no contexts later than the Third Intermediate Period were recovered. The eight stratigraphic levels showed a continuity in the settlement plan between the different periods and phases of the area, as well as the proximity of the settlement to the river. The Middle Kingdom period of the site, Levels VII-VI, was characterised by a series of residential installations (houses/room units) which were enclosed within a wall on their east side, which may 'have been an ancient riverside wall' (Giddy 1999b, 2-3), and outside the wall was a silo.

During the New Kingdom (Levels IV-II) there were three distinct architectural patterns. Once these patterns were established during the mid-18th dynasty (Level IV), they were maintained, despite an increase in the number of installations. These three areas within RAT ran from west to east; on the west were a series of narrow rooms, resembling magazines, in the central area were small scale houses and on the eastern side were two larger houses with courtyards (see Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1986, 5; Jeffreys and Malek 1988, 17; Jeffreys 1996, 287; Giddy 1999b, 2-3).

Even the small area under investigation demonstrated a careful delineation of living space as the larger houses on the eastern side were made distinct from the rest of the site, in particular the smaller houses in the central zone, through the maintenance of the

north-south wall established in the Middle Kingdom (see Jeffreys 1996, 287). The zones were distinct not only in the clear definition of space but also through the activities witnessed in the archaeological record. On the east side of the site there was more frequent rubbish removal, while on the west side there was much more frequent rebuilding as well as more evidence for domestic activities (Jeffreys 1996, 287).

The whole area of RAT, however, consisted of mudbrick structures, with earth floors (typical for the lived environment in ancient Egypt), and RAT was not, apparently, an area of any wealth (Giddy 1999b, 3). The continuity of the area suggests that it was run by an institution, such as a temple or administrative complex (Giddy 1999b, 3). Jeffreys thought that the eastern side of the site may have been a 'priestly quarter': 'the incidence of a New Kingdom priestly quarter on the east may connect with the new temple precincts in that direction, providing a hierarchical "buffer" between the temple zones and the secular through ancillary dwelling areas (of temple workmen?) on the west' (1996, 290). As with the examples cited at the beginning of this chapter, this was an area which may have been created by the powerful for its 'employees'. Nevertheless, independent adaptation of this environment may have been possible.

The ceramic finds from this site were extensive, including non-Egyptian pottery: 'while Cypriote Base Ring, Red Lustrous ware, Black Lustrous ware and Mycenaean pottery occur in small quantities (Mycenean being the most common), by far the largest group of imports are the Canaanite jars, represented by sherds' (Bourriau 1990, 19). The majority of the ceramic finds (Egyptian and non-Egyptian) were those involved with 'food storage, preparation and consumption' (Giddy 1999b, 10). In connection with this, the archaeobotanical remains at the site were recovered.

The objects from this area were numerous, over 2000 (many in a very fragmentary state), and among them were a large number of tools, which initially led the excavators to identify the area as an 'artisans quarter' (Jeffreys, Malek and Smith 1986, 4).

Instead, the evidence is now thought to point to 'domestic household practices' (Giddy 1999b, 3). These domestic household practices are brought to life through the meticulous recovery and analysis of the objects from RAT. The diversity of objects suggests a situation in which 'each member of the community was involved in many different social and economic roles' (Shaw 1998, 1059 - see fig. 3 for a graph comparing diversity of activities at Memphis, Malkata and Amarna).

Domestic identities

The individual houses/installations may have been multi-functional spaces in which people lived, worshipped and carried out forms of manual work. The clear delineation seen in the street patterns and in the division of public space, seems to have been less clear once inside the home. A series of objects (the majority made from Nile silt) from RAT have been classified as free-standing figurines and statuettes, always a controversial designation. This is because it immediately endows an object with religious meaning when there may well have been none (see Picasso's speculation that one of his artistic creations might be wrongly interpreted as religious in future, just as ancient Egyptian objects have been, in Gilot and Lake 1990, 298). Comparative evidence and context as well as distinctive iconography can be crucial in assigning a figurine as male/female, deity/toy, deceased ancestor/anonymous 'individual' or as an element in magical and fertility rites (see Ucko on predynastic Egyptian figurines 1968, 427-34; Finley 1975, 88-90). These 'categories' need not have been exclusive.

This fluidity is necessarily reflected in archaeological literature where re-interpretation is ongoing. For example, Meskell (2002, 84) would prefer to interpret the bed models and female figurines from Deir el Medina as from the 'sphere of sexuality and fertility' when others have assigned them as toys. In Giddy's presentation of figurines from RAT, which were found at all levels of the site, this uncertainty is ever-present. For example, some figurines were classified as 'male' purely on the basis of a 'lack of

feminine attributes' (Giddy 1999b, 43 - compare Ucko 1968, 174). As acknowledged by Giddy (1999b, 310) her category of 'models, games and miscellaneous objects' may well include those objects (in particular clay animals) which were primarily religious, and classed amongst the 'male' figurines there may be those items which were primarily used as toys (1999b, 43-9, catalogue 46-9). Furthermore, none of the items were found in their primary site of deposition, so that any meaningful contextual analysis is impossible (Giddy 1999b, 13).

Despite these inevitable difficulties with the evidence, it can be informative. Patterns of practice (whether ritual/play/embellishment of living space), similar to those in other parts of Egypt and further afield, emerge. Figurines classed as female (Giddy 1999b, 28-42, catalogue 32-49) on the evidence of positive characteristics can be compared to similar items also found in a settlement context (though to a much lesser degree) at Amarna and Deir el Medina. The 'heavy wigs' have been interpreted as reminiscent of Hathor (see Giddy 1999b, 32; Figure 41), although it is only on a pottery figurative plaque that a definite identification of Hathor can be made (Giddy 1999b, 51; Figure 42). The domestic context (albeit secondary) for similar figurines at Deir el Medina and Amarna has led to the inference that they were used within the 'sphere of family life' (Pinch 1983, 414), and the association with domestic fertility rites remains (Pinch 1983, 412; Meskell 2002, 84). Whatever their precise function, the presence of female figurines in RAT illustrates a participation in cultural patterns of activity in the personal/domestic domain which are also seen in Upper Egypt as well as in the colonial outpost of Beth She'an (see Giddy 1999b, 32).

Primarily surviving from the site of Deir el Medina, a class of stelae (the *šḥ lkr n R*^c stelae) indicate the existence of ancestor worship in New Kingdom Egypt (Demarée 1983, 4, 279-87). These stelae were made by the villagers, could be placed within their houses, and were points to which offerings were brought (see Demarée 1983, 280-1, 286). A stela was dedicated to a close relative to whom prayers could be addressed

(Demarée 1983, 282). Linked to these stelae, are the anthropoid ‘busts’ from Deir el Medina, to which a gender can only rarely be assigned (Demarée 1983, 289; Friedman 1994, 114-7) but which are regularly interpreted as being part of an ancestor cult as well.

Both these types of items point to a personal interaction with the past and with the religious world outside the immediate structure of temple worship. This may also have occurred in RAT, where a limestone anthropoid bust was found (Giddy 1999b, 43, 49; Figure 42), and where two limestone stelae (one only surviving as a fragment Giddy 1999b, 299-301) were also excavated. These date to the Ramesside period, and one of the stelae depicts a deity, probably Ptah, standing on the left, with what may be a falcon or a vulture (Giddy 1999b, 300). These have been connected to the *šḥ lkr n Rʿ* stelae (Giddy 1999b, 301). Once more, however, the problem of original deposition severely limits their interpretation as part of a household shrine. They may have been brought into RAT as a secondary use, for stone (Giddy 1999b, 300).

Fragments of forty-six cobra statuettes were found, made from pottery (with the exception of one limestone statuette), from all periods of the site (see Giddy 1999b, 13-28; catalogue 19-28; Figure 43), and these may also point to household beliefs. Unlike other cobra statuettes found in Egypt, these were free-standing and thus (apart from two parallels in Amarna, and a wooden parallel from Deir el Medina) bear the closest resemblance to statuettes found outside Egypt, in particular from Beth She'an (Giddy 1999b, 17-8).

Until these finds in RAT, cobra statuettes from Beth She'an had been interpreted as a fusion of non-Egyptian and Egyptian religious practices (Giddy 1999b, 18). Instead of external influence, however, a Lower Egyptian deity, Renenutet (a cobra goddess), could have provided the major inspiration for the manufacture of such objects. As discussed by Giddy (1999b, 18-9), there is evidence for local devotion to Renenutet,

with a shrine in Memphis dedicated to her as well as a cult centre in the Giza area. Furthermore, the one example of a limestone statuette may be a representation of Meretseger, the cobra goddess of Thebes (see Chapter 2; Giddy 1999b, 19).

Interpreting the existence of a statuette of Meretseger in a Lower Egyptian context has raised questions similar to those posed by the presence of non-Egyptian pottery types (see above). Thus Giddy (1999b, 19) concluded

‘for the moment it would be precipitate to postulate a fully-fledged Meretseger cult at Memphis. One can certainly speculate, however, about the possible presence of Upper Egyptian ‘immigrants’, be they a single family or a small community or workforce, residing temporarily or permanently at Memphis and continuing, at a household level at least, the local cult practices of their place of origin, or indeed assimilating such practices (and their material manifestations) with the domestic cults of the Memphite community’.

Material finds inspired by non-local belief systems frequently lead the interpreter to suggest a non-local owner and generator of such items. As seen above, this is not a necessary approach, and the actual owners could just as well have been long-standing Memphites.

The above ‘classes’ of objects can, with some justification, be interpreted as indicative of localised, domestic practices which were influenced by the official domain, in that their forms were recognisably ‘Egyptian’. This is not surprising, given that RAT may actually have been a locality owned by a temple, the objects made by those who worked in the official domain on a regular basis (compare Deir el Medina in Demarée 1983, 280-1). They may have been used in a variety of religious, magical and domestic (entertainment) practices.

These interactions are further illustrated by a class of objects: ‘items of personal adornment’. Motifs familiar from religious as well as royal settings were worked into items of adornment worn by both women and men living and working in RAT (Giddy 1999b, 53 - 131). Faience was the dominant material used, for items which ranged from earrings to anklets. The use of faience seems to have been as a substitute for more

precious materials, thus the owners may not have had access to wealth. Despite this, from their omnipresence, items of personal adornment were considered essential:

‘the quantity and variety of personal adornment, albeit most commonly in faience, highlights the “everyday” character of these artefacts in the lives of the inhabitants of this sector of Memphis and, moreover, in a sector of the settlement which the architectural and other archaeological finds would suggest was of a relatively humble character’ (Giddy 1999b, 54).

The shared motifs across boundaries in New Kingdom Egypt meant that self-definition as an Egyptian, could result in similar reference points, in similar modes of appearance (see Robins 1999, 67 for discussion of hairstyles as status indicators amongst Egyptians). Thus someone living in RAT wore pendants which were formed out of hieroglyphic/religious symbols central to the Egyptian state (Figure 44). For example, a faience *ḥt* sign and a copper alloy fly were amongst the finds (see Giddy 1999b, 76-88).

Scarabs similarly formed a decorative element for those in RAT, as a selection of scarabs were discovered, mostly made from either faience or steatite. They would have formed part of larger items of personal adornment, such as a ring or a bracelet (see Giddy 1999b, 54-72). On these objects a devotion to the monarch could be recorded, with the owner thus declaring his/her loyalties through the wearing of an item on which the king was depicted receiving offerings (see for example Giddy 1999b, 59-60). All that separated such items from those which the king and his circle wore was the material and workmanship. The essential element, the message conveyed by the motif, was the same. Nevertheless, the actual interpretations of such motifs and the reasons for utilising and wearing them, could have differed vastly.

Items of personal adornment formed just one aspect of the outward presentation of a specifically Egyptian identity. Amongst the finds at RAT were cosmetic instruments, not in any great quantity, but dispersed amongst the New Kingdom (and later) levels of the site (Giddy 1999b, 167-76). Cosmetic instruments have thus been seen as part of

the 'everyday' (Giddy 1999b, 170), items into which energy, care and expense could be invested and which would find long-term use amongst the residents of RAT, resulting in the small number of discarded items left in the archaeological record.

Copper alloy was the most luxurious material; other materials used included faience and bone. Such objects are well-known from other contexts in Egypt, especially the funerary, and testify to an apparently shared desire to maintain certain norms of appearance. Thus amongst the finds there were copper alloy hair curlers/manicure sets (EES 87a-b) as well as kohl sticks (in faience and haematite EES 1401, 2270, 1410), and copper alloy tweezers (for example EES 1018). A series of non-ceramic vessels, the fragments of thirty-one vessels in all, may include items which were meant to be used in the preparation of cosmetics (Giddy 1999b, 256). These were made from stones such as calcite, diorite-gneiss and granite, and included two kohl-pots.

Domestic pursuits

Alongside the impression given by material finds such as those discussed above, whereby the residents of RAT appear to have followed as similar a lifestyle and patterns of belief to their rulers as their circumstances allowed, is that of a self-sufficiency. Rigorous excavation techniques ensured that an unprecedented number of tools and instruments were discovered and recorded (Giddy 1999b, 161-253). It is, as yet, impossible to assess whether such finds are atypical for a Nile Valley settlement site (see Shaw 1998, with inconclusive 'conclusions' on this point; Giddy 1999b, 161-2). As noted above, the scale of the finds initially led the excavators to define RAT as a distinct area, an artisan's quarter, but instead, the tools and instruments are now understood to have been used within the domestic setting.

The individuals living in RAT seem to have performed a multitude of tasks, and with such skills generate layers of social and economic interaction outside those dictated by

the state. The picture envisaged for riverbank areas as places of informal economic exchange (see above) can thus be extended to actual settlement areas as well. The variety of tools and instruments indicate the variety of occupations, presumably sometimes carried out by the same individual.

For example, weaving and fishing (Giddy 1999b, 162-6, 193-201) are testified by the bone netting tools as well as by stone weights (one of which was an anchor). As summarised by Giddy (1999b, 195), the stone weights were not only used within fishing contexts but also 'bear witness to a variety of quasi-industrial and domestic activities often poorly represented in the archaeological record - weaving, fishing, systems of exchange and regulation - activities which undoubtedly took place at several levels of formality within the community'. The blurring of boundaries between domestic and industrial activities, between activities carried out for immediate domestic purpose or those which were for wider gain, mean that the same tools could have been put to use in both spheres of activity. Thus the largest pounders (see Giddy 1999b, 210-4) would have been used in the construction of buildings, on an industrial and domestic scale, and in the manufacture of stone furniture for domestic or temple use (Giddy 1999b, 212).

As in Deir el Medina, where the tomb workmen were able to carry out considerable economic activities on their own behalf (see Lesko 1994, 12), so too in RAT do there seem to have been similar openings for work outside the immediate domain of the state or home. The power represented by the official buildings in Memphis did not mean that individuals were always left unable to exert any choice in the conduct of their lives. A variety of personal skills could be utilised in the maintenance of an acceptable lifestyle.

Domestic adornments

Yet, even when there is no direct imposition of power by the state over the ways in which individuals choose to live or how they choose to organise their own domestic space, there is still often a high degree of conformity with the dominant culture (see Baines 1996b, 361). In the Memphite context, this conformity, whether from a conscious effort to identify visibly as an Egyptian or whether from an anxiety not to stand out, has been seen in the construction of personal appearance. It is also witnessed by those items which were used to enhance the internal and external domestic space (Rapoport's semi-fixed elements - see above).

These are included amongst those objects which have been classed by Giddy as 'household items' (1999b, 133-59), 'non-ceramic vessels' (1999b, 255-89 - the ceramic vessels have yet to be catalogued), and 'architectural, inscriptional and sculptural pieces' (1999b, 291-306), but, as seen above, may have included figurines/statuettes. With the household items, Giddy mentioned the proviso that they could have been intended for use within a state-building, and merely discarded in RAT (1999b, 133), although they may also have been re-used in RAT.

This question is particularly raised by the glazed faience tiles in the south-west and west-central areas of the site (Giddy 1999b, 138-42). These had not previously been found outside a palatial context (or in an area closely associated with a state building) in Egypt, itself a problematic statement due to the lack of settlement sites excavated. Thus Giddy used several hypotheses to explain their appearance, amongst which was the suggestion that they were in a domestic context, having been re-used, or that this area of RAT was an abandoned state building (Giddy 1999b, 140). If the tiles were re-used, or even generated for a domestic context, then a close link, in terms of material culture choices, between the different spheres of Egyptian life could be suggested. That

their use within a domestic, non-state, context should not be excluded is argued by Giddy (1999b, 140):

‘But rather than dismissing as “residual” every tile fragment that has only otherwise been found in a palatial context, or a context associated with large state residences, perhaps here we should begin to accept that at least *elements* of more grandiose schemes were used at an everyday, domestic level, even if that use was only secondary (i.e. the tiles may well have originated from a palatial-type structure).’

The range of other household items seems to support the idea that an interest and an investment in material culture, in enhancing the living environment, were not confined to official areas in Memphis, although their presence raises the same questions as the tiles (Giddy 1999b, 144, 151). Thus one item of furniture for example, could have decorative features, made separately, added onto it (see Giddy 1999b, 142-50). Such features, classed as fittings, drew upon a range of motifs including one in the shape of a papyrus flower (faience - EES 610/EAO 30). The mere presence of furniture, itself not an essential part of the domestic environment, also testifies to this interest in material culture at a localised level (Giddy 1999b, 133, 153-9). As with the items of personal adornment, those making the furniture out of stone (stools, tables, and supports) were probably seeking to imitate furniture made out of more expensive materials such as wood (Giddy 1999b, 153, 155). The stone supports also suggest that furniture in other more precious (but perishable) materials did exist (Giddy 1999b, 155).

Further indications that function was not the overwhelming concern in equipping a house, are provided by the ways in which utilitarian and non-utilitarian vessels were made out of hard-to-work materials. These add to the ‘impression that there existed in the settlement a fair degree of interest in material assets, and assets not always of a strictly utilitarian nature’ (Giddy 1999b, 255). The vessels included large stone bowls, carved out of hard stones such as granite and basalt, as well as calcite cups. These may have been used for domestic purposes, such as the preparation of food, and for the maintenance of any household cults (Giddy 1999b, 255).

It is not surprising, however, that despite the apparently quite cramped architectural layout of RAT, the residents desired to own a selection of household items which would not have been out of place in more spacious domestic settings. Given the obvious investment into different kinds of 'quasi-industrial' activities by the community, and the localised means of exchange and production of surplus, embellished household items need not have been a luxury difficult to access. The influence of the dominant culture on the residents of RAT as witnessed by the range and style of possessions was significant. The domestic environment could be a potent purveyor of status, as also attested at Amarna (Crocker 1985).

One of the ways in which an individual's house could be embellished and made distinct was through the use of a carved stone lintel, under which every visitor to the house would pass. These may actually only have been granted by the state to certain officials, rather than being the product of an individual choice (Giddy 1999b, 302). An inscribed stone lintel was found in a New Kingdom context in RAT, and has been dated to the Ramesside period (Giddy 1999b, 302-303). It had been discarded, inevitably leaving uncertainty as to its original placement (Giddy 1999b, 302). The symmetrical scene shows two priests, one on either side, with characteristic shaven heads. Accompanying this were the priest's name and titles.

Life in RAT

Despite the many finds at RAT, much about the area remains elusive, with no clear conclusions as to its purpose and no in-depth understanding of the lifestyles of its inhabitants possible. For example, there are a large number of objects which the excavators were unable to classify, and this in itself was seen as significant by Giddy:

'these objects serve as a reminder that our own vision is limited, indeed very clearly finite and conditioned by our own cultural experience. That material remains of this 'other' culture exist but cannot be defined in terms of our own culture perhaps renders them the most significant remains of all those recovered from the Kom Rabi'a excavations' (1999b, 307).

Furthermore, the almost total lack of written material (for example ostraca) from the site is initially surprising, given the wealth of other sorts of material remains. Literacy, as seen in Chapter 2, was by no means a universally accessible skill. Within this excavation area, literacy may not have been necessary, with other means of recording interactions (especially business) possible (see the recut potsherds Giddy 1999b, 291-2). Although it is also clearly impossible to argue that all those in RAT were illiterate with the problem of 'negative' evidence highlighted by Giddy (1999b, 291).

What is clear, however, is the extent to which the ideals and beliefs seen in temple and palace settings in Memphis were mirrored in the material possessions of the inhabitants of RAT. Thus deities from official settings found form as pendants for use within the home. Pleasure (and prestige) could be gained from the possession of items which had ascetic as well as utilitarian purpose. A visibly Egyptian lifestyle could be maintained, reinforcing the suggestion (O'Connor 2001, 131) that the elite worldview was able to endure because it incorporated non-elite beliefs. At the same time, those in RAT could act independently from the state, in localised production activities.

Memphis as a setting for pilgrimage

That opportunities for personal devotion to the range of deities worshipped in Memphis were not only accorded to those with power is clear. The placement of votive offerings, as discussed above, attests to the desire of some of the populace to seek assistance from the sacred world. Within the city, it was possible, to a limited extent, to visit religious sites such as the wall of the great temple complex of Ptah. There may also have been possibilities for Memphites to travel outside the confines of the city as an act of devotion, to the cemetery areas and the pyramid fields. These were an integral part of the city (see Thompson 1988, 3).

The idea of pilgrimage, of a journey specifically in order to visit a sacred site/person, is well-known from many religious contexts, and is more and more frequently applied to the ancient world. Merely to go on a pilgrimage implies a high degree of devotion to a deity, as well as a willingness (and freedom) to use any 'leisure' time, however minimal, in an act of personal piety. In the ancient Egyptian context, where, as was discussed in Chapter 2, travel was something rarely undertaken, a religious visit could be incorporated into a military or a mining expedition, for example, instead of being the reason for a journey (Yoyotte 1960, 24; see also Volokhine 1998, 54).

In a volume of *Sources Orientales*, published in 1960, a study of pilgrimage in ancient Egypt was included alongside studies of pilgrimages in other parts of the world such as India. In this, the existence of pilgrimage in ancient Egypt was taken as a given (Yoyotte 1960, 20). The key pieces of evidence used by Yoyotte (1960, 22-4) to argue for the existence of pilgrims in ancient Egypt included votive statues/stelae and graffiti. Similarly, the incorporation of the oracle into religious festivals at Thebes during the eighteenth dynasty has been seen as creating a religious experience for the wider populace, as argued by Assmann (2001, 194):

'from far and near, people flocked to Thebes to be present at the Opet festival and to take part in the new experience of a new divine presence. The festival became an occasion of pilgrimage and thus the locus of a great public gathering that united the land and served as an ideal stage for royal propaganda'.

Travelling to some of the more visible foci of the Memphite landscape, such as the pyramids at Giza, would have been a not inconsiderable journey from Memphis, and as such would not have been a widely accessible, easily undertaken, pilgrimage for many in Memphis. Yet sites to which devotional visits by Memphites were made at the Memphite cemeteries and the Giza plateau have been identified (see Yoyotte 1960, 49-52, 57-60; Zivie 1976, 282; Zivie-Coche 1988, 119-211; Volokhine 1998, 81). Such visits apparently stemmed not only out of a desire to pay respect to a particular deity, but also to pay respect to the illustrious monuments of those from the ancient Egyptian past, themselves deified individuals (see Redford 1986, 190, for the effect Giza and

Saqqara had on the royal circle; Vernus 1995, 165-8 for importance of the past in official ideology).

Khaemwese, one of the sons of Ramesses II who became the high priest of Ptah at Memphis, is the most renowned Egyptian individual to whom an interest in the Egyptian past can be securely linked (see Redford 1986, 196-7; Aufrère 1998, 16-22; Ray 2001, 82-90). He appears to have spent much of his time in Memphis, and set about restoring the monuments of long-lost individuals (Redford 1986, 196), although as noted by Redford he also plundered some monuments for stone. His reputation for scholarly, and pious, interest in the past was such that he featured in later Demotic literature, the *Setna* 'cycle' (Aufrère 1998, 17-8; Ray 2001, 94-6).

At both Giza and Saqqara he restored monuments, recording his actions in inscriptions, and thus paid respect to deceased kings as far back as the Old Kingdom (Aufrère 1998, 18-22). In this process, he uncovered lost features of the landscape, including a statue of a son of Kheops in his funerary temple at Giza (Aufrère 1998, 20; Ray 2001, 87-8). At Saqqara, the monuments renovated by him included the step pyramid of Djoser (Aufrère 1998, 20). This landscape could be as important to the Memphite (at least to the royal Memphite) as the religious areas in the city, most notably the great temple complex of Ptah.

It is also important not to romanticise the New Kingdom elite attitude to the monuments around Memphis. Whilst some areas at Giza were restored, others were used as easy sources of building stone in Memphis and in Giza itself. As just noted, even a figure known for his interest in the past, such as Khaemwese, destroyed as well as restored monuments. Alongside a perception of Giza as a site in which the ideology of kingship could be re-affirmed (see Lehner 1991, 405), was an accompanying willingness to dismantle the monuments of past rulers. For example, the great temple complex of Ptah

in Memphis was constructed with blocks from the valley temple of Khephren (Lehner 1991, 394-5).

Unfortunately, it is also impossible to access how those actually working on the reconstruction of these ancient monuments viewed their task, whether the landscape (with the tombs of deified ancestors) had any impact on them or whether it was merely part of the everyday toil. Similarly, McDowell's (1992) assessment of the engagement with the past by those in Deir el Medina concluded:

‘with respect to our own impression about the average workman's awareness of the past - that in general he did not know and did not care - it is more than likely that we are doing him an injustice. The sources simply do not ask the right questions. Therefore, it would still be interesting to get ahold of one workman for one day and find out what he really knew about the past’ (1992, 108).

Votive offerings and graffiti are the main sources for ascertaining the New Kingdom use of the pyramid fields. Neither source really gives any indication of the religious patterns or thought processes of the wider populace. This is despite the best hopes of later interpreters (see above with reference to Schulman). Graffiti as a source material appear to have more potential for demonstrating the spontaneous thoughts of the ancient Egyptians. The investigation of graffiti has thus been characterised as ‘the study of human beings using a form of written communication that is invariably free of social restraints’ (Peden 2001, xxi). This statement, at the beginning of Peden's study of graffiti from Egypt, appears to be discounted by the actual content of the graffiti enumerated. The vast majority of the graffiti merely record the owner's name, titles and any pious hopes (see also Franke 2001, 38). The standardised phrases stemmed directly from elite culture, and, far from being ‘free of social restraints’ seem instead to be infused with social restraints. Graffiti in ancient Egypt are not motivated by the desire to record subversion, as in more modern societies. Rather, the information to be gained from graffiti is primarily from their location, showing patterns of movement and the interpretation of different points in the landscape.

At the site of Abusir, the pyramid fields of the 5th Dynasty kings, the mortuary complex of Sahure became the focus of a cult dedicated to Sekhmet in the New Kingdom (Borchardt 1910, 101-106, 120-35; Yoyotte 1960, 49-50; Zivie-Coche 1988, 114). A chapel of Sekhmet was built there, and she was invoked as 'Sekhmet of Sahure'. Votive stelae were placed in the environs of the temple (see Borchardt 1910, 101; 121-9), amongst which were ear stelae of the type seen in Memphis. The New Kingdom rulers played the key role in the generation and stimulation of this religious site (Borchardt 1910, 101, 103-104).

Non-royal visitors to the mortuary complex of Sahure recorded their desire to visit Sahure's grave (see Borchardt 1910, 121-9). As a deceased, and now deified, king from ancient Egypt's past, it was seen fit to give him offerings and offer up prayers. At one time it was possible to note at least twenty graffiti, now mostly faded, in Sahure's funerary temple. Amongst those which have been recorded (see Peden 2001, 59-60, 95-6), is one from the reign of Tuthmosis III, and another from either Amenophis II or Tuthmosis IV's reign.

The writers of both texts (scribes) specifically stated that their intention had been to worship Sahure, a deceased king of Egypt (see Megally 1981, 219-40; Peden 2001, 59-60). The continual theme of Memphis as a locality for non-Egyptians is raised by the analysis of the second graffito (Megally 1981, 231-2). This was dedicated by an individual whose father's name was Anat-Montu, combining the non-Egyptian deity Anat with the Egyptian deity Montu. Megally (1981, 232) thus suggested that the graffito was written by someone of 'foreign origin' who, because of his supposed foreign origin, may then have lived in the 'colony' at Memphis. Needless to say, this is another example of the circularity of the argument concerning the presence of non-Egyptians in Memphis.

Visits were also made to the temple of Userkaf during the reign of Tuthmosis III, as witnessed by several graffiti (Peden 2001, 58-9), one written by a high official (the overseer of the granary of Upper and Lower Egypt). As demonstrated by a Ramesside graffito placed in the tomb of the fifth dynasty vizier Ptahshepses, a visit to Abusir could combine an interest in seeing the pyramids with the desire to express devotion to Sekhmet of Sahure (Peden 2001, 95-6).

The evidence from Abusir shows the two-fold aspect to devotional visits in the New Kingdom. A desire to visit a particular site could stem both from an interest in the monuments of the past as well as from a desire to worship a particular deity. These two aspects cannot really be separated, as the owners of the monuments were themselves perceived as deities from whom help could be sought. The New Kingdom kings played an important role in the establishment and stimulation of such religious practices. From the graffiti (and the votive stelae) at Abusir it appears to have been the literate, those with some degree of power who were most able to make such visits, or who were, at least, the most able to leave some record of their visit. Dahshur and Meidum were visited with similar motivations (Peden 2001, 63-7, 101-102).

A similar pattern is seen at Giza (for a discussion of the area delineated by this term, see Zivie-Coche 1988, 113- 6), a site which had been in decline until the New Kingdom (Zivie-Coche 1988, 116) when it became a focus of religious visits. These were centred around the sphinx, who became identified with the god Harmakhis; Amenophis II built a temple to Harmakhis (later enlarged by Seti I) just north-east of the sphinx (Yoyotte 1960, 50-1). The construction of this temple, and the sphinx stela of Amenophis II (see above), did not mark the onset of the worship of the sphinx, whose placement in the midst of what was an area often used for royal hunting trips out of Memphis had ensured its prominence in the royal mind (Yoyotte 1960, 50; Zivie 1976, 321; Sourouzian 1989, 50). It is in a document from the time of Amenophis I that the name of Harmakhis is first recorded (Zivie-Coche 1988, 119). The development of a

religious centre based in this Old Kingdom setting may have been in order to situate the New Kingdom kings firmly in the tradition of the successful Old Kingdom rulers (Zivie-Coche 1988, 120).

Zivie-Coche (1988, 119) viewed the creation of a cult centre based upon the sphinx as a different phenomenon to that seen in Abusir with the cult of Sekhmet of Sahure. At Giza, in contrast, an entirely new cult had been developed around an old monument (Zivie-Coche 1988, 119). The success of this initiative may be seen in the royal and non-royal votive stelae dedicated to Harmakhis by the elite (Zivie 1976, 327), and in the identification of Harmakhis with the Canaanite god Houroun (Zivie-Coche 1988, 120; 1997, 64).

But it is inevitably Saqqara which can be most closely linked to Memphis, and which, from the quantity of the graffiti, appeared to have been visited the most (Peden 2001, 61; Baines and Riggs 2001, 111, who called the patterns of use at this site 'antiquarian visits'). In the New Kingdom it was still used extensively as a burial site for important Egyptian officials (Martin 2000, 115-9) as well as Memphite citizens, and as a centre for renewed mortuary cults. Excavations at Saqqara continue to reveal wealthy and elaborate tomb complexes (Martin 1992, 35-98; Zivie 2001). Martin (1992, 41-2) has emphasised the intense activity which would have been focused at the site, with people working on the construction sites, as well as priests at the mortuary temples and visitors to the tombs of their relations and ancestors.

From the graffiti at Saqqara, four key motivations in visiting the site have been identified: 'to inspect out of a sense of curiosity and piety, the great monuments of a distant past; to offer up prayers to the gods of Western Memphis on behalf of themselves and their families; to honour the memories of famed rulers of the Old Kingdom; and to ask the latter to intercede with the gods for the benefit of the petitioner' (Peden 2001, 61). Those writing the graffiti were not only from the royal

circle, but seem to have included those in less elevated positions as well, scribes from Memphis (Peden 2001, 61). Not surprisingly, the step pyramid and associated temple complexes were the main focus for visits, with cult of the deified king Djoser active (Peden 2001, 62-3, 96-9). Yet a multitude of other monuments, both from the distant and more recent past, and under construction, would have been passed by anyone visiting Djoser's pyramid.

It was not by no means a site devoid of people or facilities, but instead was a built-up area (more so than at Giza, see Zivie 1976, 324 for a description of activity at Giza). It is hard to imagine that these sites (including Djoser's pyramid complex) would have been freely and generally accessible. Questions of access may well have been just as complex as within the city of Memphis, and may even have been more complex. In western Thebes, the government devised a series of measures, which might have included checkpoints, to limit access to the necropolis areas (Ventura 1986, 171-9). Any regulation was not to prevent the Deir el Medina community from interacting with the rest of the Theban population (McDowell 1994, 41-2, 58 in contrast to Ventura), but to regulate those who tried to enter the Valley of the Kings.

Using the term 'pilgrimage' for the patterns of use in the sacred sites in the vicinity of Memphis implies a freedom of movement and expression of personal devotion which may not have been present. Both amongst the New Kingdom royalty, and their immediate circle, it seems to have been necessary to display an interest in, and a devotion towards, those who had built the monumental structures which framed the Memphite horizon. Throughout the New Kingdom, there was an incredible investment into the maintenance of earlier structures (although this was not universally true, with some structures mined for stone, as elsewhere in Egypt) and into the establishment of new religious and mortuary sites. The graffiti and votive stelae testify to a desire to record pious visits, and to seek help from the deities located on the desert edge.

Despite the tone of the sphinx stela of Amenophis II, in which Giza was depicted as somewhere accessible from Memphis with the aid of good horses, for the majority of Memphites Giza would just have been somewhere visible on the horizon (on a clear day). Or else it would have been the setting for hard physical labour. Even in Saqqara, a site intimately linked to Memphis, there would have been areas beyond which only the most privileged could go. The range of sacred localities in the pyramid fields and in Memphis would have had similar limitations of access, which nevertheless may not have extinguished a desire to express devotion to the deities resident there, as far as was possible. For the New Kingdom rulers (and to an uncertain degree their subjects), the pyramid fields around Memphis were a fundamental part of the city.

Conclusion

The New Kingdom city of Memphis appears, to the modern observer, to have been the epitome of an Egyptian city. Surrounded by what today seem the essential aspects of the Egyptian civilisation, it may have been hard not to identify as an Egyptian, as a Memphite. The foci of the city were the royal/religious complexes, which each New Kingdom ruler re-worked and added to. As the locality for one of the major deities in ancient Egypt, Ptah, the scale of great temple complex of Ptah was equivalent to that of Karnak. The city was built to function effectively as a royal capital, with port areas from which military expeditions to Syria-Palestine could set out, and to which goods from the rest of Egypt and abroad could be transported. As was seen in other royal cities, such as Thebes, due investment was made by the rulers into the cemetery areas, where mortuary cults to long deceased kings were renewed, and new temples built.

That the royal/religious complexes did not operate in total isolation is clear from the evidence of RAT. In this very minimal excavation area, ample evidence has been found to demonstrate the uptake of religious ideas as well as recognisably Egyptian high elite material culture (albeit in much less precious materials) within domestic/industrial space

(the boundaries of which were fluid). The two worlds may have been closely connected. If, as has been suggested, RAT was lived in by those who worked in the administration of the temples, then any close links are unsurprising, and indicative of the limited sector of the population revealed in the evidence.

A Memphite could operate on several different levels within the city, and might even have been able to circumvent the official areas of the city. An individual could work in an official setting but at the same time benefit from transactions on a more localised basis, or could approach the wall of the great temple of Ptah as an act of devotion as well as maintaining a domestic cult, and could combine a belief in Memphite deities with a belief in non-Egyptian deities. Similarly a perspective on the city of Memphis as the most important locality did not need to preclude an understanding of the wider environment, with visits to the pyramid fields and their monuments to the kings of a united Egypt.

Due to an understanding (and a bias in the evidence) of 'high-elite' culture as typically Egyptian, other forms of belief and practice can be construed as un-Egyptian, or as surprising, when for a Memphite they might have been as essential a part to Egyptian self-definition as more recognisably Egyptian traits in material culture. Thus the interpretation of objects apparently of non-Egyptian origin, of the widespread worship of non-Egyptian deities, or of the ownership of luxurious items of material culture in a basic domestic architectural setting needs to be placed firmly within the experience of being an Egyptian. The non-Egyptian could be incorporated into the Egyptian, or not, as the situation required.

This almost ambiguous situation reflects that depicted in the textual world. Strong expressions of self-definition as seen in monumental texts directly relate to the layout of the monumental environment in which these texts were located. Yet the more localised sources of identity as seen in the previous chapter can also be discerned in the

Memphite environment, in areas such as RAT and implicitly by the very exclusivity of the royal/religious areas, which the majority of the populace were unable to approach. Thus, despite the existence of statements of identity which conform to the Althusserian picture of ideological manipulation and to Rapoport's understanding of the Egyptian palace, there were also more flexible reference points for self-definition. That this was demonstrably possible is significant. Being a New Kingdom Egyptian certainly involved a lot more than can be inferred from the limited written and material record, and than was perhaps allowed for in the ideological system of ancient Egypt.

CHAPTER FOUR

SELF-DEFINITION IN THE COPTIC TEXTUAL WORLD

From the New Kingdom to the Coptic

The reasons

Over one thousand years had passed between the culmination of the New Kingdom and the use of Coptic as a fully-formed written language in the third century CE (Bosson 1999, 69). In that period, Egypt had inevitably changed as non-Egyptian rulers once more controlled the land and being a non-Egyptian became a mark of prestige. Pockets of non-Egyptian culture were created through the development of cities such as Alexandria and Antinoe, and it became the Egyptian who could be perceived as a source of disorder, of chaos. Thus Egyptians were expelled from Alexandria in 215 CE (MacMullen 1964, 183-4), and it was the life-styles of the non-Egyptian, in particular the Greek and Roman which were preserved and upheld by those in power.

Despite these huge changes in the political orientation of Egypt, there was not a total rejection of the pharaonic civilization. For example, there were developments in the Egyptian language and in artistic conventions. The non-Egyptian rulers sponsored the construction of Egyptian temples in which they were depicted as truly Egyptian kings, and the Egyptian priesthood survived, with the hieroglyphic repertoire extended in nuance and function. The interaction between the Mediterranean, the Greek, and the pharaonic worlds resulted in new styles of depiction, as well as in the development of new religious ideas and deities, such as Serapis whose popularity spread far beyond Egypt - even to northern Britain, an unimagined world for the New Kingdom Egyptian.

Thus, in terms of the survival of the pharaonic, the Coptic period is of huge relevance as during this era the pharaonic civilization was discarded, not to be revitalised. The

landscape of immediately pre-Coptic Egypt would not have been that startling to the New Kingdom Egyptian, and, for the modern scholar much of what is known about, for example, pharaonic temple ritual is derived from texts inscribed in the Temple of Horus at Edfu, built between 237 and 57 BCE (Wilkinson 2000, 205). There had also always been development and change at sites central to the religious world of the ancient Egyptians, such as Thebes, as each king sought to leave evidence of his presence and piety.

Nevertheless, with the gradual onset of a new religion, which demanded exclusive devotion, and with the demise of strong centralised government, knowledge and interest in the pharaonic civilization and religion receded and was ultimately rejected. The decline in the knowledge of hieroglyphs and hieratic can be traced through documents. These demonstrate that the rise of Christianity cannot be directly linked to their demise: demotic had instead been used as the language of sacred texts. The last hieroglyphic inscription dates to August 394, in the form of a votive graffito on the temple of Isis at Philae (Frankfurter 1998, 248-9). At the same time, however, the rise of Christianity as a religion which apparently bore no relation to the pharaonic inevitably resulted in a complete change in religious ideology in Egypt, for the first time in three thousand years. Thus as a point in Egyptian history at which to examine the potency of a switch in ideological systems for the Egyptian people, the Coptic era presents an apt paradigm.

Background and approach

The tight self-definition of the Egyptian state is undermined by some of the surviving evidence. Even with a highly centralised power base, at the height of the New Kingdom, inadequacies and inconsistencies in statements emanating from the king and his circle could not be eliminated. Nor does there seem to have been a desire to eliminate inconsistency. It was tolerated and generated by the kingly circle. Both in the

textual world, limited though the extant evidence is, and in the lived environment of Memphis, it was possible to explore, question and ignore Egyptian ideology, but at the same time to define oneself in response to it. This was despite the overall stability and strength of the Egyptian world-view which allowed it, for the most part, to survive for three thousand years.

With the Coptic era, there was an equivalent energy put into the generation and maintenance of a Christian world-view, which, according to those such as Frend (1982), became a specifically Egyptian Christian world-view after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. It was a turbulent period of change for those in Egypt, as the Egyptian past was cast in an utterly negative light. This was not the first time that the past had been rejected in Egypt. As mentioned in Chapter 2, certain Egyptian kings disassociated themselves from previous rulers, destroying evidence of their rule. Each intermediate period had also been depicted by ensuing rulers as a time of disorder to be spurned. For the first time, however, an entirely new ideological system was promulgated in Egypt, in which there was no period in the Egyptian past which could be looked back to with nostalgia or admiration.

Despite this, the past could not be entirely forgotten. The Coptic language became the last stage of ancient Egyptian, preserving a few demotic signs, a whole grammatical system and a vocabulary which can be traced back to Old Egyptian. Likewise, the built environment of Egypt provided a constant witness to the pharaonic civilization which was gradually being transformed into a Christian environment. Amongst the rural inhabitants of Egypt, customs derived from pharaonic Egypt persisted. Thus, for modern scholars, such as Blackman (2000 [1927]), the pharaonic could still be discerned in the lifestyles of twentieth century Upper Egyptians.

It is not, however, the purpose of this second section of the thesis to trace a simple progression between New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt (see the comments and

approaches of Zandee 1971, 219). This has been the remit of several modern scholars, especially those who were concerned with emphasising the link between modern Copts and the ancient Egyptians (see Butcher 1897). In particular, the role of the patriarch of Alexandria has been directly compared to that of the ancient Egyptian king, despite reservations (Cannuyer 1992). Thus scholars have drawn upon a very few references in Christian texts in which the patriarch was called a pharaoh, and seen a conscious nationalist connection with ancient Egypt (see Hauben 1998, 1350). This is now seen to have been a modern re-interpretation (Reymond and Barns 1973, 5; Hauben 1998, 1351-2). Instead the term stemmed from a biblical context: 'carrying exclusively negative connotations, the biblical image was intended to vilify persons deemed to give evidence of tyrannical and oppressive behaviour, or of excessive greed. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the Egyptian heritage' (Hauben 1998, 1351). Drawing on the same biblical associations a modern anti-capitalist handbook has been entitled *Two Hundred Pharaohs, Five Billion Slaves* (Peacock 2002).

Christianity has also been rooted in ancient Egypt by Afrocentrist scholars (Finch 1986, 179-200). A further example is presented by the work of Coptic scholars seeking to motivate and empower emigrant Copts (Ayad 1989). In this, certain attributes of the modern Copts were identified and then directly traced to the ancient Egyptian world. For example, the Coptic concern with 'moral conduct' was connected to the ancient Egyptian who 'was very concerned with his moral conduct, his reputation and behaviour' (1989, 100). Even the wearing of perfume by Coptic women was viewed as directly inspired by ancient Egyptian practices (1989, 100).

In contrast, the timespan separating New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt is vast, and any connections between them were primarily in terms of geographical space. The use of studying the two alongside one another is in the ideological contrasts and their impact (or not) on self-definition. Christianity was able to supersede one of the longest surviving civilizations (admittedly in decline) which had even been shown a token

respect during the Roman domination. Yet it was not to survive as the major religious/political ideology in Egypt, with the Muslim conquest of 641 eventually ensuring the demise of Coptic as a living language, and the demotion of Coptic Christianity to a minority religion. The Coptic Christian became the outsider.

In this section of the thesis, the questions asked mirror those examined with reference to the New Kingdom, in order to assess better the impact of ideology on self-definition under apparently very differing situations. During the Coptic period the ideas propagated during the New Kingdom were discarded, and replaced. This process is investigated through utilising the same types of sources as for the New Kingdom.

First, expressions of self-definition and of the correct functioning of the world found in textual sources, specifically letters, are looked into. As with the New Kingdom, the relationship between ideas expressed in different types of written communications is explored. Secondly, the question of how far different ideologies influenced the construction of the built environment is investigated through a study of the urban settlements at Thebes. In New Kingdom Memphis, it was possible to trace the delineation of residential/working areas as well as the very limited opportunities for interaction between public and private space. Likewise, with Coptic Thebes, the relationship between religious and residential areas is analysed.

The intervening years

Documents such as the Late Ramesside letters stem from the very last stages of New Kingdom Egypt. Gradual disintegration and change, witnessed on archaeological sites by the extensive establishment of settlement areas within temple enclosures, resulted in the eventual break-up of Egypt as a unified political entity. Power relations between the different structures of the state, the military, priesthood and king had already been undergoing re-negotiation, with the priesthood assuming equivalent and eventually

greater power than the king (see O'Connor 1992, 229-32; Mysliwiec 2000, 26). The death of Ramesses XI in 1070 is taken as the final endpoint of the New Kingdom, after which power was openly divided between Tanis and Thebes (Assmann 1996, 319-45).

Despite this political division of Egypt during the Third Intermediate Period (1070-712), the memory of a united Egypt was maintained, with re-unification attempted on several occasions. Dynastic marriages reinforced links between the rulers of Tanis and Thebes, and excavations at the city of Tanis have shown the extensive re-use of pharaonic structures and objects as well as the existence of highly skilled workmanship. For example, in the royal tomb of Psusennes I (1040-992) a collection of gold vessels was discovered which 'testify to the continuation of the finest traditions of the New Kingdom; in the perfection of the technique, they rival the masterpieces found in the tomb of Tutankhamun' (Mysliwiec 2000, 29).

It was during this period that people of alleged non-Egyptian origin exerted power in the style of New Kingdom kings (see Baines 1996b, 378-80). For example, Shoshenq I (945-924) was from a Libyan family based in Bubastis (Assmann 1996, 346-50). Shoshenq attempted to unite Egypt, ruling as a fully Egyptianised king. Despite brief attempts at centralisation, the Third Intermediate Period was characterised by kings ruling simultaneously in places such as Herakleopolis and Leontopolis (22 - 25 dynasties).

Of these dynasties, the 25th became the most important in the long term, as another non-Egyptian, Piye conquered as far north as Memphis. As a Nubian, from Napata, Piye saw himself as an Egyptian seeking to re-establish order in Egypt (see Stela of Piye Lichtheim 1980b, 66-84). The Late Period (712-332) saw Piye's successor Shabaka (712-698) unite Egypt, effectively establishing this Nubian dynasty as the most powerful in Egypt (Assmann 1996, 371-5).

The origin of the rulers of Egypt appeared to make little difference to the Egyptian state. Instead the new rulers firmly positioned themselves in Egyptian history, looking to the past in the generation of new art forms (Assmann 1996, 375-493), termed 'der Kult der Vergangenheit' (Assmann 1996, 400). This was particularly marked during the 26th dynasty. Egypt also alternated between being a province of other territories and carrying out invasions in Asia and Nubia. For example, Psammetichus I (664-610) functioned as a vassal king of the Assyrians (Lloyd 1992, 338).

As in the New Kingdom, non-Egyptians formed a vital part of Egypt's armed forces. Greeks and Carians were used by Psammetichus I, and became important in trade as well. This is demonstrated by the founding of Naukratis in the seventh century, which, during the reign of Amasis (570-526), was declared to be a town solely for Greeks. Egypt also became a haven for Jewish exiles from Babylon (see Ray 1992), and much of what is known about this period derives from non-Egyptian accounts, such as the histories of Herodotus.

The Persian rule (525-404; 343-332) resulted in Egypt being depicted as subservient, just one amongst the many provinces of the Persian empire. Despite the bad reputation of the Persian rule in Egypt, propagated in Egyptian as well as non-Egyptian sources, archaeological evidence has revealed that it was not an entirely negative period for Egyptian culture (Mysliwiec 2000, 135-7). Even the statue of Darius from Susa, which proclaimed the subjugation of Egypt, drew upon Egyptian art forms and texts to situate Darius as the just heir of the Egyptian throne (Mysliwiec 2000, 146-55).

The impact of the non-Egyptian upon Egypt was further strengthened with the establishment of the Ptolemaic Dynasty (304-30). This followed Alexander the Great's victory in 332, and Egypt was administered as an independent country by the Greeks. Greek culture, education and language was promoted for the Greek population which settled throughout Egypt, for example in the Faiyum. Continual investment into the

Egyptian temples was made (although the priests of the Egyptian temples were themselves part of the Greek power structure distanced from the Egyptian population: see Bianchi 1992), while at the same time Alexandria was developed as a centre of Greek culture. Official identities could be bestowed by the state (although see Goudriaan 2000, 58 who emphasised the lack of official designations) and result in differential treatment: 'being a Greek or an Egyptian was not just a matter of personal and community feeling ("ethnicity"), but also official policy; being Greek involved some privileges that an Egyptian could not claim' (Clarysse 1992, 52).

For the Ptolemaic period, leading into the Roman period, historians have analysed the lives of those in Egypt using terms usually associated with the modern past. Thus the literature of the Ptolemaic period (for example, the *Oracle of the Potter*) has been understood as 'nationalist propaganda', in which the Egyptian condemned the Greek (Lloyd 1982; Sørensen 1992; Frankfurter 1993, 253-7). Furthermore, the Roman period in Egypt has been analysed as a time of unrelenting hardship for the Egyptian: 'Egypt thus became a land exploited on behalf of foreigners, a role she had not been subjected to even in the worst days of the pharaohs and the Ptolemies, when at least the product of her labour had remained in the country' (Watterson 1988, 16). This comment was inspired by the status of Egypt as the personal property of Octavian (Augustus) following the Battle of Actium (30 BCE), and then as a province of Rome (from 14 CE) under which heavy taxes were levied on the Egyptian population (Ritner 1998, 1-2).

The presence of different populations in Egypt, with the country ruled by the Greeks and then the Romans has led to varied opinions on the extent of interaction. Whilst hostility, as seen in the *Oracle of the Potter*, and open riots between different peoples as well as revolts occurred (see Goudriaan 1988, 107-108), there has also been a desire to present cultural interaction as the pre-dominant feature of Egyptian life (see Ritner 1992). Ritner (1998, 5) has forcefully stated that 'the Egyptian elite was sharply distinct

from the rural fallahin, and hardly a second-class citizenry cowed by the perception of a Greek “master race”.’

Yet in the Roman period, new regulations consigned the Egyptians to the lowest status, allowing the imposition of certain taxes and punishments on the basis of identity (Reinhold 1980, 100-101, 103) and no official legitimacy was given to the Egyptian language (see Ritner 1998, 6-9), although following 212 CE it was possible for Egyptians to become Roman citizens (Lewis 1984, 19). Support and development of Egyptian religious traditions did, however, flourish under certain emperors, for example Trajan (98-117 CE), who pictured themselves in the guise of Egyptian rulers (Ritner 1998). Furthermore, material witnesses to the pharaonic past were highly valued as shown by the number of tourists to sites such as the Colossi of Memnon (see Foertmeyer 1989), and by the removal of pharaonic antiquities to the imperial capital, amongst other locations.

The Coptic Period

The Coptic period, as understood in this thesis, covers the fourth to the ninth centuries, a time in which Coptic became the most widely used language in Egypt. As a term, it has no political reference. Nevertheless, it allows the focus of investigation to be demonstrably the Coptic speakers, the majority of the population, and for whom cultural patterns persisted in spite of political changes.

Use of the term ‘Coptic period’ is not universal, with many scholars preferring to divide these centuries into their political phases: Roman, Byzantine, Islamic. Furthermore, a broader term of ‘Late Antiquity’ is also applied, reinforcing Egypt’s position in the Late Antique world in general (Giardina 1989, 103). The assignation of historical periods is a much debated topic, and one which imposes almost arbitrary differences and barriers (as well as broad generalisations) onto the Egyptian evidence

(see Bagnall 2001, 227). Lewis (1970) argued that the term 'Graeco-Roman Egypt' for a period which covers Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine Egypt was not useful. This was on the basis of the lack of precision provided by the term. The 'Coptic period' can be similarly historically imprecise, but, as defined above, serves the purposes of this thesis.

During the fourth century, Egypt still fell under the Roman Empire, until 323. At this point it became incorporated into the Byzantine world under whose auspices it by and large remained (once succumbing to a Persian occupation between 619 and 629) until the Byzantine Treaty of 641 in which Egypt was surrendered to the Muslims. Alexandria itself did not surrender until 642 (Cannuyer 1996, 36).

This political change was combined with the growth of Christianity, the decline of paganism alongside the introduction of Islam after 641. During the growth of Christianity in Egypt, the Christian world as a whole was in a state of flux as it debated what should be the canonical form of Christianity. It was after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 that Egyptian Christianity became sidelined. It maintained the Monophysite position, in opposition to what became the official Diphysite view (Atiya 1968, 58). Thus in Egypt at this time there was not a single viewpoint on what the Christian lifestyle should be either, with heretics a continual source of worry to those who considered themselves orthodox. The Diphysite Byzantine rulers ruled a population, the Christian part of which was considered heretical.

Coptic Egypt was composed of areas which differed greatly in character (Figures 3-4). There were highly urbanized areas, for example the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, or the oasis town of Karanis as well as smaller settlements based around a monastic foundation, such as existed at Wadi Sarga. Furthermore, there were those who chose to live in border zones, on the edge of the cultivation or further into the desert, either due to asceticism and the desire to lead the life of a hermit, devoted to God, or due to

the need to avoid the penalties of the state (although these two reasons need not have been distinct).

The country itself was divided into huge estates, the owners of which, had, from the fourth century until 641 been gradually taking over the duties of the state (Bachrach 1967, 165). Agriculture was the main source of work (Kaegi 1998, 34-5). The Muslim conquest initially appears to represent a turning point for Egypt, yet it has been argued that there was a high degree of continuity for those who lived in towns and villages (Kennedy 1998, 67; Wilfong 1998b, 181-2). As had been the situation in Byzantine Egypt, central authority was felt in the realms of taxation and military service. Islamic influence was still largely limited to the main administrative areas and the major effect of the change in power would have been in taxation, with non-Muslims classified as *dhimmi*, and thus having an extra poll tax to pay (Ye'or 1996, 121-4; Wilfong 1998b, 179).

In spite of certain aspects of continuity in the administration of Egypt through these religious and political upheavals, inevitably some repercussions were felt, especially amongst certain sectors of the population. Christianity was a banned religion, between 110 and 210. Nonetheless it was followed and propagated in Egypt, amidst a variety of other religious beliefs and practices. Persecutions on account of a refusal to deny Christian beliefs occurred at intervals. For example, the beginning of Diocletian's reign (284) was taken as a starting point for the Coptic calendar, preserving a memory of the particularly violent persecutions of Christians in Egypt initiated by Diocletian. These links between the persecutions and the use of the Coptic calendar were, however, only crystallised in the ensuing centuries. The Coptic calendar was only declared as the official calendar of the Coptic church in the eighth century, and it was not until the eleventh century that the term 'Era of the Martyrs' was used (O'Leary 1937, 34).

Constantine's declaration of Christianity in 312 meant that Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, and persecution and exile became the fate of heretical Christians or non-Christians. Thus Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria was repeatedly exiled, first by Constantine in 325. In 392 paganism was banned by imperial edict, and the Serapeum destroyed by Christians (for a discussion of these periods see Frankfurter 1998; Cannuyer 1996). During the sixth century the majority of non-Christian communities had ceased to function, except for those which were more isolated, such as by Lake Mareotis (Wipszycka 1988, 157-8). Some of those who converted to Islam may have done so straight from paganism, without having become Christians first (Rémondon 1952, 72).

The success of the Muslim conquest has been attributed, in part, to the eagerness of the Monophysite population to rid themselves of their Diphysite rulers, a point seemingly reinforced through the re-instatement of the Monophysite patriarch by the conquerors (see Den Henijer 2000, 239 about the Coptic historiographical response to conquest). Other factors were also important, including the incompetence of the Byzantine rulers (Kaegi 1998, 49-50). The first few centuries of the Islamic period in Egypt did not circumscribe to any great extent the freedom of the Copts. The rulers supported the Monophysite church, Copts maintained a large role in the administration of the country and churches continued to be built (Abdel Tawab 1986, 324-5; Wipszycka 1988, 160). As expressed by Lapidus (1972, 249): 'for Arab leaders the world had been conquered in the name of Islam, not for the sake of converting it to Islam'.

That life did not solely follow a simple continuum, even for those in towns and villages, is suggested by a series of rebellions in the eighth century sparked through excessive taxation. In the Delta as well as in Upper Egypt, Copts rebelled against their rulers (Lapidus 1972, 256; Kennedy 1998, 67). These rebellions were eventually crushed (in 832), an event linked to the onset of widespread conversion to Islam. Certain regulations against the Coptic population were initiated at intervals between the

eighth and the ninth centuries, such as the public wearing of yellow turbans (see Lapidus 1972, 253, 258; Alcock 1999, 24). At the same time, however, Copts continued to play a role in the administration of the country and in the development of public buildings, such as the mosque of Ibn Tulun (built in 876-9).

The literate world

The written evidence from Egypt at this period reveals the main languages to have been Greek and Coptic. At some point during the second to third centuries Coptic was developed (Cribiore 1996, 3), and written documents testify to its increasing utilisation in all spheres of Egyptian life, urban and rural. Documents could be written in both Greek and Coptic, and certain renowned individuals (such as Dioscorus of Aphrodito) revealed knowledge of the Greek world in their composition of Coptic texts (Rubenson 1992, 16; Rousseau 1999, 18-9). Communities such as those at Wadi Sarga often chose to express themselves in either Greek or Coptic depending on the context (see Clackson 2001, 43). As stated by Parkinson (1999a, 102): 'contrary to what is often assumed, the two languages were not divided between poor country dwellers speaking Coptic and sophisticated town dwellers writing in Greek'.

The embeddedness of Coptic in Egypt is demonstrated by the multiplicity of dialects. Each had a geographic locale: the broadest division came to be made between Sahidic Coptic in the south of the country up to Memphis, and Boharic in the north, the Delta region (Cannuyer 1996, 76-7, 218-9). For the majority of the population, at least those living outside the main administrative cities, Coptic was the first language (Wilfong 1998b, 184), with Sahidic the most widely known dialect (Kasser 1966, 109). Latin and Arabic were more directly linked with the ruling powers, as languages of administration which rarely (at this point) saw use outside official documentation. Yet for those living in Fustat, administering the new province of the Islamic caliphate, Arabic was the language of daily life, as well as officialdom for its 200,000 residents (Kubiak 1982, 128; Kennedy 1998). Coptic survived as one of the languages of

administration until 705 when a decree asserted that Arabic was to be the sole official language of administration (Wilfong 1998b, 184-5).

These four languages were not the only languages to be used in Egypt at this time. Coptic speakers consistently translated other works from the Christian world. In Thebes (see Chapter 5), there were Syriac texts, and the translation of texts essential to the Christian life required an intimate knowledge of such languages. The Jewish community in Egypt, specifically in urban settings such as Alexandria and Babylon maintained their knowledge of Hebrew, generating sacred texts as well as translating them into Arabic (Stillmann 1998, 198-201). Furthermore, the impact of nomadic peoples, raiding Egyptian villages and towns, meant that other languages were heard. When Samuel of Kalamun was attacked in the western desert during the seventh century, those who attacked him were noted as speaking a different language (see Alcock 1983, 13, 87-8 'their language').

An instinctive reaction when approaching the Coptic period after New Kingdom Egypt is to be overwhelmed by the apparent wealth of textual evidence. The context of literacy in the Coptic period was far removed from that of the New Kingdom. No longer does access to the written appear to have been regulated and limited. It was such a spirit of enthusiasm which led MacCoull (1986a, 41) to state (without citing any specific evidence): 'the amount of letter writing that was practised at all levels of Coptic society and at all periods was prodigious'. This statement bears little relation to the evidence.

The problem of literacy in the ancient world (Greek/Roman) has been extensively looked at, but without much reference to Coptic. The power that the written word could exert within an ancient society has been widely acknowledged (see for example with reference to Egypt Frankfurter 1998, 268-9). The Vindolanda texts from Hadrian's Wall, dating to 90-120 CE illustrate the dual role of literacy: uniting disparate populations over a large area, and, when used by those with power, being a method of

ensuring tight and efficient control. The letters from Vindolanda demonstrated the use of Latin outside the immediate context of government (Bowman 1996a, 110-1), but at the same time the percentage of people fully able to participate in the reading and writing of such material was minimal (Bowman 1996a, 111). Little individuality was shown in the letters which were a 'form of gift exchange and dialogue' (1996a, 123).

Following the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman world, textual works were vital in putting forward view-points. Thus bishops such as Dionysius, patriarch of Alexandria in the third century, were able to make known their views on religious matters through texts such as the festal letter (Bowman 1996b, 134-5). When certain Christian communities became the dominant way of life in the seventh to ninth centuries texts played a vital role. They maintained the importance of a community and served to point out the perceived faults of others (Cameron 1996, 198-200, 204-205).

It has been argued (Johnson 1986) that Coptic texts played a large role in the anti-Chalcedonian polemics of the period. In particular Shenoute's works have been identified as central in the theological struggles in Egypt, and it was these struggles which have been identified as central to establishing self-definition amongst the Copts (Barns 1964; Wesselzky 1992, 617; Behlmer 1998, 358). Thus texts were one of the ways in which identity (especially of marginalised groups) could be established and maintained (Lane Fox 1996, 129).

The actual establishment of Coptic as a new form of the Egyptian language has been seen as demonstrating the relationship between orality and literacy, illustrating the demand for another means of writing within Egypt (Orlandi 1986, 52; Bowman 1991, 125). The development of Coptic has been romanticised just as the extent of literacy has. For example, Hopkins (1991, 146) claimed 'Coptic originated as a script of protest'. This protest, he argued, was directed against the government and the Greeks -

although the very fact that the Greek alphabet and a considerable quantity of Greek vocabulary were used in Coptic seems to minimise the idea of Coptic as a 'script of protest'. This was perhaps implicitly acknowledged by Hopkins as he went on to state that Coptic represented a 'cultural fusion' between the Greek and Egyptian worlds (1991, 146).

The inadequacies in Hopkins' argument concerning the purposes of Coptic were highlighted by Bagnall (1993, 253). In a footnote he claimed that 'the whole situation is badly misdescribed by Hopkins', and instead emphasised the bilingual world out of which Coptic arose (Bagnall 1993, 253; see also Rubenson 1992, 16). Thus 'the invention and use of Coptic itself is in no sense anti-hellenic' (Bagnall 1993, 253). This more logical argument has been put forward by others as well: Parkinson (1999a, 102) stating 'Coptic was developed in a thoroughly bilingual and educated setting'. The initial stages of Coptic may have been in a non-Christian environment, to record vowels in religious incantations (Ritner 1998, 9; Aufrère 1999).

A further purpose of Coptic was suggested by Hopkins (1991, 146) who argued that it was used 'to help in the conversion and education of the lower class faithful'. For Hopkins, therefore, there was 'pervasive sub-elite literacy' which enabled and furthered Christianity as a successful religious ideology (1991, 158). A significant level of literacy was essential for Christianity (according to Hopkins), although he also acknowledged that literacy, at any level, was not a pre-requisite for participation in that religious life. This is an important proviso, given the limited impact of literacy within Coptic Egypt.

Two studies, in particular, have tried to assess the impact of literacy on Coptic society in more detail. Steinemann (1974) carried out a detailed quantitative assessment of the number of literate in Djeme (western Thebes) based upon the legal documents discovered there. Djeme itself is unusual, because of the large number of texts found

there, and the detailed record which they provide of one town. To discover the percentage of literate in Djeme, Steinemann examined the proportion of people who were able to sign their own documents (1974, 103-104). From this evidence, it appeared that during the eighth century 40-50% of people were able to witness their own documents, and that between 50-60% of people were unable to, using scribes instead (1974, 110).

Steinemann's conclusions have been questioned (Wipszycka 1984, 287), in particular his assumption that the group of people studied in these randomly surviving documents could be considered representative of the population of Djeme as a whole. Likewise, Wipszycka did not want to extend the percentage of literate (40-50%) to the whole of Egypt. Bagnall (1993, 257-8) had the same misgivings as Wipszycka, feeling that the witnesses recorded in the Djeme texts were unrepresentative as they belonged to a minority sector of society, and were 'people of standing and property' (1993, 258). It is also significant that amongst this privileged sector of society up to 60% could not write their own signature.

A broader approach to assessing the extent of Coptic literacy was attempted by Wipszycka (1984). Instead of focusing on the texts of one town, texts relating to a variety of locations were utilised. For example, the range of contacts revealed by the letters of Bishop Abraham of Armant revealed a world in which reading and writing were '*une habitude quotidienne*'. This was only true amongst the priests of the villages to whom the letters were addressed. The letters of the Monastery of Epiphanius (near Djeme in western Thebes), which are used extensively in this chapter, reveal an apparently high concentration of literacy amongst a monastic population. The evidence from here, and from other monasteries, reveal that '*la plupart des moines savaient lire*' (Wipszycka 1984, 294). The evidence used by Wipszycka was exclusively produced by those working within the church, which itself enabled and furthered literacy (see also Wipszycka 1972). The conclusion drawn was that literacy need not have

decreased between the fourth and the seventh century, and may actually have increased (1984, 295). From Wipszycka's studies, it is only possible to draw conclusions about the extent of literacy amongst monks/nuns and priests. In this limited context, literacy seems to have been an accessible, and necessary, skill, but to generalise from this to the rest of society could be misleading.

As with New Kingdom Egypt, it is also necessary to emphasise the different levels of literacy which would have allowed a greater extent of the population some access to the written (Lane Fox 1996, 128-9). Boundaries of literacy and illiteracy could be just as blurred as in the New Kingdom. With reference to Greek documents, 'slow writers' have been identified (Youtie 1971). This description was used in Greek documents to describe 'an entire class of writers' (Youtie 1971, 247) who were not able to write easily and who 'are grown men, sometimes women, who are using their meagre attainments to carry out the business transactions which provide their livelihood' (Youtie 1971, 251). Such people did not fit easily into the category of either literate or illiterate, and could switch between the two.

The functions of literacy dictated who were literate. For example, those in governmental positions had to have some knowledge of Greek or Coptic (and after 705 Arabic) (Lefort 1955, I), and those who chose to become monks, nuns or priests could also attain some degree of literacy as well. The possession of high status and wealth did not necessarily lead to literacy, as 'those in the propertied class who could afford education could also afford to get people to do the writing for them' (Bagnall 1993, 258). Yet literacy, at whatever level, obviously could extend out of its immediate functional contexts, for example via families of those who were literate. And, as in the New Kingdom, the textual was one of the prime mediums for the discussion and transmission of ideological beliefs. The oral transmission of texts was a centrally important technique in spreading a knowledge of Christian beliefs across Egypt.

Textual boundaries

Within Egypt, the boundaries between those of different beliefs were often laid down and negotiated in texts. For the Christian, many of the central texts were translations and copies of the psalms and gospels. The methods by which such texts were made public or communicated to their communities included oral recitation (Frankfurter 1993, 33), circulation of books and manuscripts (see Winlock and Crum 1926, 196-208), and public display. For example, a sermon condemning heretics was written up on the whitewashed walls of the tomb of Daga, which had been transformed into the church of the Monastery of Epiphanius (Crum and White 1926, plate XV).

Furthermore, texts were incorporated into art forms, into textiles, wall paintings and woodwork (Bénazeth, Durand and Rutschowskaya 1999). This is particularly demonstrated by the interior of the churches of Old Cairo (Babylon). For example, a lintel of carved sycamore wood (of the fifth/sixth century) once inside the Church of Al-Mo'allaga depicted the Entry into Jerusalem and the Ascension alongside which a hymn in praise of Christ had been carved in Greek (Gabra 1999, 96-7). Texts also entered into the domestic context, with stone lintels above the entrances to houses incorporating a design often including Christ's name (see Chapter 5). A text endowed an object with meaning, and was not merely a decorative feature. Even objects such as a key used in the White Monastery (during the fifth/sixth century) included a text set into its design (Gabra 1999, 88).

By such means, a body of beliefs could be established and maintained, and certain texts became part of the experience of being an Egyptian. The importance of the text as a defining feature for someone's life is seen in the burial of individuals with texts. In a fourth/fifth century cemetery of Al-Mudil, 40 kilometres north-east of Oxyrhynchus, a Coptic psalter was found placed underneath a young girl's head in a shallow grave

(Gabra 1999, 110-1). Through texts, reference points were created which an individual could chose to abide by, or not.

The lives of certain individuals were held up, and proclaimed, as examples which could be followed and admired. In hagiographical texts, an individual was praised and her/his life described, including her/his avoidance of temptation. As a genre of literature, Coptic hagiography was very closely linked to Greek hagiography, with the presumption that many Coptic lives of saints and martyrs were translations of Greek originals (Orlandi 1991, 1191-6).

The *Life of Shenoute* was written by one of his disciples, Besa, in about 460, with all probability in Coptic, rather than Greek. Shenoute's fame was established for the western world by the work of Leipoldt (1903). In this his life and work were analysed as establishing a national religion, and from Leipoldt's work his reputation as a crude, harsh leader arose. The narrative themes in Shenoute's life demonstrate the important aspects of the Coptic monastic life, as assessed by one of his contemporaries (Leipoldt and Crum 1906; Bell 1983).

Shenoute was described as showing self-discipline, denying himself sleep (see chapter 12), and was firmly placed in the Old Testament tradition, compared to Elijah (see chapter 18). Besa emphasised Shenoute's humility (chapter 21), and underlined his status as a holy individual; for example, Shenoute was able to travel on a cloud (chapters 54-67; Leyerle 2000, 452; compare Kuhn and Tait 1996, 1-2, 7, 142-5, stanza 19-21). Non-Christians were routinely singled out for harsh treatment (chapter 81) and were described as pagan ('Helenos'). Shenoute led missions to destroy idols (chapter 83), and other hostile groups included the Blemmyes (see chapters 89-90; see below), and the barbarians (chapters 106-108; see below). Furthermore, Shenoute was shown as being of equivalent, if not more importance than the local powers (see chapters 106-108).

A similarly strong assertion of self alongside a disdain for those who could not be included in that belief system was expressed in the *Life of Samuel of Kalamun*, written by Isaac in about the eighth century (Alcock 1983). In contrast to Shenoute, Samuel spent much of his life in the western desert, in the Faiyum, then in the Siwa Oasis (Kuhlmann 1998, 174) during the seventh century. His life was one of privations imposed by others. Yet his beliefs did not waver.

A vivid description of the impact of being forced to live with those of different belief systems is provided. A group of hostile, nomadic peoples, described as barbarians (understood as 'Berbers' by Alcock), captured Samuel (chapter 14). He was kept in captivity undergoing harsh treatment until eventually he succeeded in converting some of the Berbers (chapters 17-23). In the descriptions of this period in Samuel's life, emphasis was placed on the strange religious customs of the Berbers (chapter 18). Life became better once the Berber village had acknowledged the validity of Samuel's religious beliefs.

The *Life of St John the Little* (c. 339-c. 409) by Zacharias of Sakha (see Mikhail and Vivian 1997; Amelineau 1894, 316-410) was written in the eighth century with no personal knowledge of the saint and with the hindsight of the post-Chalcedonian years. The themes are similar to those in the two texts above: like Samuel, John went to Scetis to become a monk (chapters 3-5) and, like Shenoute, he enjoyed the miraculous intervention of a cloud provided this time to transport him to Babylon (chapter 75). Barbarians also caused John to leave Scetis, as they were described as preventing the monks from carrying out their normal life and as having destroyed the churches (chapter 76). When living in the desert, away from the barbarians, John continued to convert those who were still pagans, performing miracles. When describing the burial of John, Zacharias took the opportunity to condemn the Council of Chalcedon along with all heretics (chapter 81).

Hagiographical texts held meaning for those following monastic as well as non-monastic lifestyles. The lessons which could be learnt were wound into a narrative which was lively and entertaining. By contrast, polemical texts, often in the form of sermons, formed a series of instructions backed up with biblical quotations. Many of Shenoute's sermons, as well as sermons written in his style, survive from the White Monastery (see Leipoldt and Crum 1906; Young 1993), in which advice on how to live correctly was frequently given. Close analysis of religious texts was used to justify a particular point of view; for example, Shenoute argued that it was possible to be a devout Christian and be married (Penn 1995). These texts were sometimes addressed to large numbers of people, displaced as a result of political unrest and seeking refuge in the environs of the White Monastery (see Emmel 1998, 86-9).

In such texts certain groups of people could be identified for condemnation, including pagans, heretics, lapsed Christians and Jews. The necessity of christianising temples was highlighted in several polemical texts, in which the alleged hideous misdeeds of non-Christians, such as sacrificing Christian children, could also be described (see Amélineau 1888, 112-3). A less emotive, but nonetheless forceful, text from the White Monastery, probably the work of Shenoute, draws a contrast between the present state of a shrine and the actions which would go on there once it had been christianised (Young 1981, see for example page 349, lines 1-7).

Most significantly, this particular text also includes a passage in which the hieroglyphic texts written on the walls of a pagan site were condemned and contrasted to the righteous texts which would be put up in their place (Young 1981, 349-50, lines 25-14). A long list of animals was incited in order to describe the hieroglyphs, and Shenoute's ignorance of the workings of ancient Egyptian were highlighted by his descriptions: 'his uninitiated eye was caught by pictures and reliefs of animals and heavenly bodies, the very hieroglyphs which are easiest to identify' (Young 1981,

356). The concern with pagan shrines occupied almost half of the text, which also covers the problems of lapsed Christians, the kingdom of heaven, wealth and the behaviour of women. For example, the struggle to prevent Christians turning away from Christianity was as urgent as the need to convert others, and this was illustrated by a quotation from the gospels (Young 1981, 350, lines 26-34). The extant section of text concluded by drawing a contrast between pious women and women who choose to keep their wealth (Young 1981, 352, lines 29-39).

A response to the apparent presence of heretical texts within the White Monastery was made by Shenoute in the form of a catechical text (see Orlandi 1982). This was probably read out in public (Orlandi 1982, 88). Shenoute appealed to the memory of Athanasius and his suppression of the Meletians to demonstrate that heretical texts should not be tolerated (Orlandi 1982, 88-9). He also worked his way through the beliefs of the heretics, demonstrating that each belief had a false basis. This included the belief that there were many worlds in the universe, and Orlandi surmised that Shenoute was responding to the Nag Hammadi texts (1982, 85-6), attacking both Origenist and Evagrian Gnosticism. The mere existence of Shenoute's response seems to indicate 'that some part of the Evagrian movement could reach Upper Egypt by infiltrating the Pachomian and Shenutean monasteries' (Orlandi 1982, 95).

Heresy could thus be at the heart of Coptic monasticism, and as much of a concern as the actual rejection of Christianity. In the eighth century, a text was produced in which condemnation was reserved for Jews. In this, the author asked 'why should I say these things to the ignorant Jew' (Elanskaya 1994, 387). Any condemnation was apparently on the basis of religious beliefs alone, although racial prejudice has been identified by Mayerson (1979) in texts such as the *Vitae Patrum*, where, for example, demons appeared as black men (1979, 311). Yet in the articulation of polemical literature, the beliefs rather than the nationality of someone took central place. This is seen in the reactions of the Byzantine church to Islam: 'what was to be defeated was Islam as a

superstition, false teaching and heresy; not as a community of people, or a nation' (Sahas 1990, 57). Similarly, in the martyrological literature condemnations were not made on the basis of country of origin:

'the crudest manifestations of national and racial prejudice are not to be found in the native literature about Egyptian martyrs, provincial as it is. There we shall find only one superior race of men, "the race of Christians", and the "fatherland" which claims their allegiance is the "heavenly Jerusalem". Indeed, the Coptic martyrologies seem to go out of their way to glorify saints of foreign origin who fulfil their martyrdom in exile in Egypt, thus setting an example to the faithful there' (Reymond and Barns 1973, 5).

Further texts which received wide circulation and which delineated the world included apocalypses, such as the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (Steindorff 1899). This was probably composed in Greek, but translated into several Coptic dialects around the end of the third century. The earliest extant manuscript dates to the beginning of the fourth century and is in Akhmimic (Frankfurter 1993, 17-8). The text is concerned with the end of the world, how good will be pitched against evil, with the righteous Christians surviving judgement day to enjoy paradise. It has been argued that as well as owing much to Jewish and Biblical tradition, the text is also firmly rooted in the Egyptian experience. Thus parallels can be made with Egyptian kingship ideology, as well as with Demotic literature (see Frankfurter 1993, 159 - 238).

In the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, the survival of Egypt in the face of disorder inflicted by her traditional enemies is a key theme. Thus the Assyrian kings and the Persians cause chaos in Egypt, with the Nile flowing blood, until a king rises to save Egypt. In order to banish chaos, places of pagan worship had to be destroyed as well. This text maintains an idea of Egypt as a unified entity, whose fate is linked to the banishment of hostile outsiders and the elimination of those who do not follow the true Christian path. Similarly emphasising the nationhood of Egypt (see Cruz-Urbe 1986, 55; Lloyd 1994, 198), the Coptic story of Cambyses's invasion of Egypt involved the efforts of Cambyses to invade Egypt. Cambyses tried several techniques to outwit the Egyptians, including writing a letter in the name of the king of Egypt, but none succeeded (see Jansen 1950 for the text).

The circulation of such texts, predominantly surviving from the White Monastery, could spread some knowledge of ideological beliefs. The anxiety seen in many of the texts shows that it was not possible to eliminate heretical or non-Christian beliefs, with continual reminders both of the happiness which may result from conversion and of the eternal punishment for those who resist. Uncertainty did not seem to manifest itself, or at least, if it did, it was speedily banished with the help of God. Underlying this textual tradition were the numerous magical texts in which help was sought from a variety of sources by those at the heart of Coptic Christianity (see section on Seti I temple, Chapter 5). It is important, therefore, not to view the Coptic Christian textual tradition as representing the whole spectrum of beliefs in Egypt. The rigidity with which the world was presented may only have been upheld by a minority of those who were able to access the texts. It is with this in mind that a distinct body of texts (letters), written by those with power as well as those without, is approached.

Letters

Greek letters from Egypt have generated much interest and research as scholars felt they were at last able to access the thoughts of whole communities (especially the early Christians) in Egypt. In the first half of the nineteenth century, a book was compiled with a list of letters so far known, from what the author termed 'the earliest times' until the fifth century CE (Roberts 1843). Different types of letters were included, and the body of the book consisted of a study of the letters of the church fathers.

Two later authors included their own prejudices and pre-conceptions in their studies of Greek letters from Egypt. Winter gave an overview of the different types of letters, and attempted to explain the absence or presence of certain letter types. In explaining the lack of love letters (1933, 129), he resorted to a generalisation not unusual for its time (compare Bell 1922), saying that 'the emotion was doubtless present, but the

expression of the idealized emotion with the purpose of creating emotion is a more or less literary device which lay beyond the competence of the Egyptian race mixture'. In a similar study, devoted to the Oxyrhynchus letters of the first four centuries CE, Meecham (1923) celebrated the way in which he felt the letters demonstrated the universality of human nature through time (1923, 70).

The broad definitions of what type of text should be labelled as a 'letter' made by these authors still stand and inevitably differ little from definitions applied to New Kingdom letters. At the essential level, letters were a means of communication between those who because of distance were unable to, or who chose not to, carry out that communication only in a spoken conversation (Meecham 1923, 37).

Christian vs non-Christian letters

Central to authors such as Winter were any insights to be gained from letters into the beliefs of early Christians. Thus for Winter it was important to point out any distinguishing features between Christian and non-Christian letters (1933, 190-1). Factors used by Winter in an assessment of an origin of a letter included biblical references (1933, 167-70) and platitudes about the Christian approach to life. For example, he stated that the Christians 'unlike their pagan contemporaries, bear their ills patiently and with a fortitude which finds its source in a new, pervading hope and assurance' (1933, 155).

This approach to letters is now of dubious validity. The pre-conceptions of Winter have been undermined by a unity of expression across letters from this period, whether Christian or not. It is not possible to attribute to a Christian origin letters which reveal what used to be considered exclusively Christian sentiments. For scholars today, it is frequently impossible to discern the religious background of a letter on its style alone. It is only possible when clear statements of Christian belief and/or biblical references

are present. Thus organising letter types into Christian as opposed to non-Christian on the basis of 'Christian' sentiments can lead to false attributions.

This is reflected by developments in the techniques used to analyse letters: no longer is the most important division seen to be between Christian and non-Christian letters. Exler (1976, 16, 18) argued that the main division in letter types should be between the 'real' and the 'unreal'. Thus a 'real' letter was one which was only meant to be read by the person/people addressed in it (1976, 15), and which may or may not show what he termed 'literary merit' (1976, 17). The category of 'real' letters may also include those letters which were written with the possibility of becoming public, but the primary intention behind an 'unreal' letter was for it to be made public (Exler 1976, 18). But, on the most basic level, Exler (1976, 16) noted, a letter is merely a form of written conversation, with no long term relevance.

A more involved approach to the central problem of how to categorise those texts which purported to be letters but which had no origin as a 'real' letter was suggested by Stirewalt (1993). For him, the context in which a letter was written was crucial. Assessing that context should then allow a more appropriate understanding of a letter's content. Three types of settings were suggested: 'normative', 'extended' and 'fictitious'.

A letter derived from a 'normative' setting was written by the sender 'in his own name to addressees known directly or indirectly to him in a contemporary context' (Stirewalt 1993, 2). This category can include official letters as well as personal letters between family and friends (Stirewalt 1993, 6-15). Even though a recipient may be addressed specifically by a writer, that letter could then be passed on to other individuals irrespective of the writer's wishes (Stirewalt 1993, 2).

Letters from 'extended' settings (Stirewalt 1993, 15-20) were intended for a wider audience. Such an audience need not have been known at all to the sender, and this type of letter 'makes available to whomever it may concern some knowledge or position which the writer feels need to publicize' (Stirewalt 1993, 15). These types of letters could be rhetorical in content, or could be a form of essay (Stirewalt 1993, 18-20) in which the letter formed a preliminary version of something which was to be published. Related to this setting was the 'fictitious setting' (Stirewalt 1993, 20-5), where those addressed in a letter need not necessarily have existed. This comprises letters such as school exercises as well as model letters and those written for entertainment. Spoken messages would have accompanied the delivery, or recitation, of all the above types of letters (Karlsson 1962, 17).

In this chapter a contrast is drawn between those letters of an 'extended' setting and those of a 'normative' setting (Exler's 'real' letter type). The letters of an 'extended' setting may mirror many of the self-conscious depictions of self seen in those texts discussed above, with some of the 'normative' letters allowing a less careful presentation of self to be conveyed.

Formulae

'In private letters especially the varied life of the common people stands self-portrayed' (Meecham 1923, 21). This statement is questionable for two reasons: first on the basis of the limited extent of literacy, and secondly because of the social restraints which seem to have governed the composition of a letter. Formulaic expressions were as central to letters from this period as they were in the New Kingdom.

This is seen in many of the letters discussed below, in which certain conventions and formulae persisted across time as well as across those with different beliefs. These conventions have been studied in detail. Greek letters have been the focus of analysis

(Exler 1976). In these, three or four main sections (White 1981, 91) have been identified, each of which could be expanded and embellished according to the purpose of the letter. Any embellishments were also dependent upon the conventions of a particular period (Karlsson 1962, 112), and by the tenth century Greek letters included far more protestations of friendship than previously (Karlsson 1962, 15). To aid this cohesive style, there would have been letterwriting manuals in Egypt (Ioannidou 1986, 6).

Coptic letters were just as carefully formulated, with the same divisions and similarly formulaic expressions. For example, a study of formulae in Coptic letters allowed a comparison between Greek and Coptic letters to be made (Biedenkopf-Ziehner 1983). Furthermore, the formulae and the *topoi* (for example, homesickness) in the Late Ramesside letters and in Coptic (more specifically, Christian) letters have been compared, showing some similarities in thought but at the same time, there are, not surprisingly, a number of differences (Biedenkopf-Ziehner 1996, 22-9). Coptic letters have been defined as 'a subdivision of Late Antique epistolography in general' (MacCoull 1986a 41). This is appropriate, given the fact that Greek and Coptic letters frequently arose from the same context, with the same authors.

Context

The majority of Coptic letters are monastic in origin, either discovered during excavations of monastic sites (such as the Monastery of Epiphanius) or bought from dealers. Such letters were composed not only by monks or nuns, but were also written by those who lived in the vicinity of a monastery, conducting business with it or needing assistance from it. A wealth of apparently trivial matters were committed to writing as well. These had only short term relevance, with the barest of explanations given by the letter writer. Likewise, most Coptic letters are undated (Worrell and Husselman 1942, 171). Any suggestions of date made by modern editors usually

cover a broad time-span (one century or more), and are based on handwriting styles or provenance.

Monastic archives and sites also preserved quantities of Greek letters alongside the Coptic. Further sites which have generated both Greek and Coptic letters include towns such as Aphrodito. There are several main areas which the letters below come from, for example, Oxyrhynchus, Hermopolis and western Thebes. The Oxyrhynchus papyri were accidentally discovered in Oxyrhynchus, a town in Middle Egypt between Herakleopolis and Hermopolis (Figure 3). It became an important town in Egypt during the Graeco-Roman period (MacLennan 1968, 12). Papyri also survive from the Faiyum area, from towns such as Dionysias and Karanis (Davoli 1998, 73-116, 301-24; Figure 3) as well as from Upper Egypt, for example Aphrodito. This site has never been excavated scientifically, but the quantity of documents found there may suggest that the settlement had been sizeable (MacCoull 1988, 2-9).

Material from three monastic sites features strongly below. Kahle published 370 of the 3000 texts found at the site of Deir el Bala'izah, which was a monastery twelve miles south of Asyut (1954, volume I). The material was found in the course of an excavation by Petrie, and because of its secure provenance it has been possible to date the texts to 675-775. Any texts from the Monastery of Epiphanius have a similarly secure provenance as the site was excavated and published (Winlock and Crum 1926; Crum and White 1926). The monastery was situated on the west bank at Thebes and was occupied until about the ninth century (Figure 81). At Wadi Sarga, a settlement site about fifteen miles south of Asyut, the excavators were unable to determine whether or not the site had been exclusively occupied by members of the monastic community. The area contained many houses, as well as a series of caves which had been turned into a church and painted with frescoes. This site was probably occupied between the sixth and seventh centuries (Crum and Bell 1922).

The authors of letters included figures such as Athanasius, Besa or a government official as well as much more peripheral figures whose lives are otherwise lost. How far opinions expressed by such differing authors concurred is examined below, as is any relationship between letters and other forms of text from Egypt. The letters are analysed thematically, with, where possible, any changes through time noted.

Delineation of the world

In direct contrast to New Kingdom Egypt, there were a number of ever shifting official identities to which a resident of Egypt could subscribe. Clear guidance and instruction could be given by those in Egypt with influence. Thus there were different groups of people, dispersed across the country, all with their different foci. When political control was tight, then there was the added focus of a central power, whether Roman, Byzantine or Islamic, demanding taxes, or corvée duty and delineating the remit of their power.

The powerful

Throughout the Coptic period, official letters were written and sent within Egypt as certain duties were exacted from the population. In the initial section of these letters the writers would list their titles, situating themselves in their political context. Clear instructions were given to ensure the compliance of the population, who may or may not have stemmed from the same ideological background as their rulers.

In order to ensure the exaction of military service from an individual a careful letter was written in Latin, on behalf of 'Count of the Thebaid Frontier' by an underling (P.Ryl.IV 609). This dates to 505, and the writer commenced by listing the titles of his superior (lines 1-2), and then emphasised the power of the Byzantine empire. This order came straight from the emperor himself, who was described in set terms derived from the Roman empire. Thus he was entitled 'Augustus' and at the same time his

religiosity was guaranteed: 'the sacred order of our lord Anastasius, the most pious, the conqueror, the eternal Augustus' (line3/4). The order was directed to one individual, identified first by name (Heracleon), then by paternity and finally by city of origin ([ortum e] civitati Hermupolitana). The rest of the letter was concerned with ensuring that Heracleon fulfilled the minimum requirements for a soldier. Thus despite the loose political control in Egypt, the ideals of tight central power, as epitomised by the Roman empire at its height, were maintained by those seeking to retain Egypt as an imperial province.

Following the Muslim conquest of Egypt, the writers of official letters, frequently administering a non-Muslim population, made clear their religious identity through formulae at the beginning and end of letters. From the town of Aphrodito, which was the capital of an administrative area, some of the official letters written whilst Kurrah ibn-Sharik was governor (709-14) survive. These were written in Greek, Coptic or Arabic, with some of the taxation letters bilingual (Greek/Arabic) whilst others were non-literal translations (see Abbott 1938, 7; Ragib 1981, 173). The governor commenced his letters (these were frequently written on his behalf) with the phrase 'in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate', included the address, in which the governor's authority would be asserted, and then stated 'I praise God, there is no other God' (see Abbott 1938, 42-4; Oriental Institute no. 13757 - an Arabic letter; Figure 45). After this statement of religious belief, the business of the letter could be dealt with, in this case the collection of taxes from bishops (Abbott 1938, 43, lines 6-14), and the letter ended with the Islamic wish that 'peace be on those who follow the guidance' (lines 14-5). This final wish was one specifically phrased for non-Muslims; when writing to Muslims the second part of this blessing ended with 'the grace of God' (Abbott 1965, 24). In another letter of the governor, demanding taxes from farmers (Abbott 1938, 47-9, Oriental Institute no. 13756 - in Arabic, with a Greek translation of the address; Figure 46), the actual writer of the letter stated his name and religion (lines 17-8) he was the 'Muslim ibn Laban'; this individual may have been a Coptic convert to

Islam (see Abbott 1938, 49). The state asserted its authority over those of different beliefs, whilst making its own beliefs clear.

For the residents of monasteries in Thebes, their Muslim rulers guaranteed them the right to live in safety and under their protection as long as they continued to pay their poll-tax (which they had not paid during a rebellion). This was ordered in a late seventh/early eighth century Greek letter (Bell 1926, 266-75; P.Metr.Mus.Accession No. 24.24; Figure 47). It survives in Greek, but with the opening formula in Arabic as well, in which both the Islamic message ('in the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no God but God, he alone and Mahommed is God's messenger': lines 1-6) and the name of the governor of Upper Egypt were stated.

Alongside such assertions of political control, in which religious beliefs were also made clear, were letters in which religious leaders sought to maintain religious authority. One of the methods used by Christian leaders to assert authority, to provide guidance, and to delineate the boundaries needed to maintain a Christian life was through the festal letters (Brakke 2000, 1114). These were addressed to the Christian population as a whole, not to a particular person (therefore they fit Stirewalt's 'expanded' setting), and as such were read out in churches, monasteries and in the open air, to an audience which often would have consisted primarily of those committed to the religious life (see Lefort 1955 for Athanasius' letters).

One of Athanasius' letters was written in Greek on the wall of the vestibule of the tomb of Daga at Thebes (see Chapter 5), the church of the Monastery of Epiphanius. Athanasius wrote the letter (which survives in several versions) specifically to the monastic communities of Egypt, to ensure that they did not descend into heresy (P.Mon.Epiph. 585). Athanasius immediately asserted his authority over the monks, calling himself the Archbishop of Alexandria (lines 1-2), and then addressed his

audience who were the 'orthodox monks in all places'. He went on to order them to remain orthodox, and to ignore any heretics.

Arising out of a similar genre to the letter above, were letters written by renowned religious figures, ostensibly addressed to one person but which were copied and read out in public as well. Besa, the biographer of Shenoute, wrote to a lapsed nun, Herai. This letter was probably read out as a public denunciation and is preserved in a seventh/eighth century copy. The sins committed by Herai had led her to abandon her status as a Christian, and be liable to condemnation as part of the pagan world. Herai's present situation meant that she was now descended from the pagan enemies of the Hebrews: 'Your father, he is an Amorite, and your mother is a Hittite' (Kuhn 1956, 109, V,4, volume 2, 105). Herai had entered a world which was in total opposition to the Christian.

Potential destabilising influences

As in New Kingdom Egypt, threats to an accepted, ordered way of life could come from inside Egypt's borders as well as from outside. Both the non-Christian and the Christian were forced to flee from barbarian attacks (as shown in Shenoute's condemnation of a pagan landowner, see Barns 1964, 158). One of the most frequent non-Christian groups of people to attack those in the Nile Valley were the Blemmyes (see Revillout 1874; Rémondon 1952, 73-8), who at intervals exerted control over areas inside Egypt (Rémondon 1952, 73). In Shenoute's writings in particular, the term 'barbarian' often referred to the Blemmyes (Revillout 1874, Rémondon 1952, 74-5).

Such designations, however, did not need to refer to non-Egyptians nor did they need to be applied solely to those who physically attacked the Nile Valley. They could simply be used to signify anyone who did not conform to the writer's definition of

correct living. In the biography of Samuel of Kalamun (see above), the potential for an individual to shake off the status of a barbarian once Christianity had been embraced was demonstrated. The use of the term 'barbarian' to express anyone who might cause disorder had a long history. In origin, the word was used by the Greeks for anyone non-Greek, which did not necessarily need to include negative connotations, but usually did (Finley 1975, 122). The early Christians themselves were designated as barbarians by the Roman world. Having achieved integration into the Roman world, however, Christians ceased seeing themselves as barbarians, but instead saw non-Christians as barbarians, using the word in the same way as the Hellenistic and Greek sources (Stroumsa 1996, 343-7, 351). For example, Stroumsa (1996, 358) noted that 'the Arabs are consistently presented in late Antique literature, including many Christian texts, as "real" barbarians, desert tribes devoid of any respectable cultural tradition.' It was even possible for Shenoute to exhort his congregation, having fled from barbarian attacks, to treat their children 'barbarically' (Emmel 1998, 82, 91).

Letter writers situated themselves against the background of the non-Egyptian, of barbarian/Persian aggression, whether writing in Greek or Coptic. They defined themselves in opposition to such categories of people. For example, a woman, who described herself as the 'mother of Moses' wrote to a Roman official, Abbinaeus, living in Dionysias (in the Faiyum). Her letter, an appeal written in Greek in about 346, asked that someone called Heron be released from military service four days early. He had been enlisted in 'the pursuit of the barbarian' (P.Lond.II 410).

Direct appeals for assistance in the face of attack by the non-Egyptian were made by different sectors of Egyptian society, to those within and outside Egypt. For example, the bishop of Syene and Elephantine wrote in Greek in the fourth/fifth century to the emperors Theodosius and Valentinus (P.Leid.II Z; Winter 1933, 181). The disquiet felt as a result of the barbarian incursions was recorded, with the impact of those labelled as 'barbarians' described. The severity of the situation was emphasised by the

writer with the phrase 'we are in the midst of the neighbouring barbarians', who were also alleged to have been destroying churches. Such letters originating from all over the Byzantine world would have been all too familiar.

When appeals to governmental officials became pointless, then monasteries became one of the places to which Egyptians could turn for assistance against non-Egyptian aggression. Thus an individual, called Papas, wrote in Coptic to Apa Elisaius, making an emphatic appeal on behalf of himself and his family (O.CrumVC 67; Figure 48). His family had become refugees, escaping from what was described as the 'south' to the 'north' because of the 'Persian'. The urgency of the situation was made clear. For example, Papas described the hunger of his children, how he had to bring them north 'that they may live', and expressed his fear that the 'Persian' would come north to find him.

Despite his eloquence on his plight, Papas did not provide any details on his aggressor, merely describing him as the 'Persian'. The recipient did not need any further information in order to understand the nature of the threat, a generalised label sufficed. For the modern reader, it leaves several questions open: whether the term 'Persian' was used for a group of people, or just for one particular person. Crum (1939a, 32) presumed that it referred to a group of people, entitling the letter 'from a man fleeing before the Persians'. The issue of what the 'Persian' had actually done was not dealt with at all in this letter.

When writing in Coptic to Panachora for help at the Monastery of Epiphanius, two women, Maria and Susanna were explicit about the misdeeds of the 'barbarians' (P.Mon.Epiph.170). This letter is in a fragmentary state, and was written in two sections, the first by Maria and the second by Susanna, in their own handwriting. In the extant parts of the letter, both Maria and Susanna showed great respect towards Panachora, whilst describing their plight. Actual physical violence was enumerated.

The barbarians had taken the 'father and the son', and were also alleged to have murdered someone (here the text is missing).

One woman living in Thebes, wrote to a priest (possibly Bishop Pisentius - see Drescher 1945, 94) and attributed much of her difficult situation to the Persians (Drescher 1945, 91-2). She was alone, as her husband had died and her son had left Thebes, and was unable to pay the tax she owed. The Persians had played a significant role in her crisis: they had stolen her cattle (line 18), and were also accused of having beaten her son (this is uncertain given the lacuna in the text - lines 15-6). One of the reasons for which the recipient was urged to help her was that she would otherwise be evicted from her house, and forced to be an exile (lines 23-4).

For the Egyptian, a resignation about the inevitability of Persian attacks enabled preparations to be made in order to minimise their effect. In this, monasteries could play a central part. An ostrakon, found at the Monastery of Epiphanius, recorded the measures taken by a widow called Thecla and her husband in an attempt to avoid the disruption caused by the Persians. On this ostrakon Thecla had written to the monastery, asking for payment for corn which her husband had given to a priest to sow (P.Mon.Epiph.300; Figure 49). This corn had been sown in order to provide necessary extra food supplies should the Persians have come south, causing chaos. This letter, and two others from the Monastery of Epiphanius (P.Mon.Epiph.433; P.Mon.Epiph.324), may have been specifically referring to the Persian occupation: 'these Persians are the invaders who held Egypt from 619 to 629' (Winlock and Crum 1926, 99).

The use of generic terms ('barbarian'/'Persian' for Coptic Egypt - with 'Persian' sometimes actually referring to Persians) to denote fear-inducing groups of people, distinguishing them from those who were no threat to ordered living, allowed letter writers to express their situation concisely. Yet the interchangeability of these terms,

and their use both for those who conducted aggressive incursions and raids against people living in Egypt as well as for those who chose not to follow the same belief system as the letter writer lead to a lack of precision as soon as a letter is read out of its original context.

This is seen in particular in a late sixth/early seventh century Coptic ostrakon from Luxor (Smith 1974, 61-6). This referred to problems caused by the barbarians: the writers Agathon and Martha asking that the recipient 'be so kind as to pray for me as the barbarians have disturbed us very much'. Alongside the uncertainty as to the identity of the 'barbarians', the writers have used a verb, *ⲙⲓⲧⲟⲣⲓⲧⲣ* , (disturbed), which was used both for ideological dissent as well as for acts of aggression (Smith 1974, 65). This letter can, therefore, be understood in two different ways: the writers were victims of physical aggression on the part of non-Egyptians (or rebellious Egyptians); or they had had ideological disagreements with certain inhabitants of Luxor. In both cases, however, there was a clear delineation of difference: the barbarians were outsiders.

It was not always necessary, however, for letter writers to resort to the terms 'barbarian'/'Persian' when describing unrest in Egypt. One sixth/seventh century Greek papyrus referred to disorder and plunder within Egypt, but did not label the plunderers as Persian or as barbarian (P.Mon.Epiph.624). Nevertheless, these two terms were central in establishing difference - with negative connotations.

The unknown person, the 'stranger', also formed an essential reference point for those living in Egypt. People could be termed strangers whether they came from a neighbouring town or from outside Egypt, a situation reflected in the designation of Persian/barbarian discussed above. When discussing strangers, however, there did not need to be any negative connotations, although the condition of actually being a stranger was not one to be envied. It was an official designation, as well as a term used by the wider population (MacMullen 1964, 184).

This was reflected in the Greek and Coptic terminology. As had long been established, the Greek ξένος could refer to a stranger or to a foreigner, and bound up with the term were Greek perceptions of the hospitality owed to a stranger. In the Coptic, ⲙⲁⲙⲟⲩ , likewise held both meanings, with ⲙⲡⲓⲙⲁⲙⲟ the term for 'hospitable' (see for example, P.Neph.15). φυγάς was used in both Greek and Coptic to mean stranger as well as fugitive.

The designation 'stranger' was often an official one used especially with reference to tax collection. In the fourth century Greek archive of a landlord called Isidorus who lived in Karanis, there is an official letter, written in 308/309, dealing with the government requirements for strangers. It stated that all strangers living in the villages for which the official was responsible, had to be handed over for tax purposes (P.Cair.Isid.126).

Strangers were just one section of the population which needed to be kept track of. Thus in the eighth century a high official (possibly the governor of Aphrodito) wrote in Coptic to a subordinate demanding that he monitor the strangers of that district (P.Ryl.Copt.277). For the bishop of Shmoun trying to catch and punish those who had stolen corn, flax and hens, strangers formed just one potential guilty segment of the population (P.Ryl.Copt.267; Figure 50). He wrote to a town, threatening the population, taking care to specify all its different sectors ('now whether it is a man or a woman or a stranger or a man of the town'), each of which 'will be under the curse of the law and the prophets' (lines 5-7). Figures from biblical texts were thus invoked to threaten the population, and the bishop ended his letter with further threats towards the culprits (unidentified as yet) based upon biblical curses.

Those labelled as strangers regularly featured in non-official letters as well as official, often mentioned in what are now very elusive contexts with no further explanation as to their identification (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 50, 1). An extreme example of the potential confusion caused for us by the use of the label $\gamma\mu\mu\circ$ is shown by a letter from the Monastery of Epiphanius (P.Mon.Epiph.413). This letter asked that something be given to the ‘camelherds of Djeme and the strangers’. The unexplained reference to strangers was understood by Crum (Crum and White 1926, 260) to refer either to refugees from another nome or to extra camels. That it was possible to label animals as well as humans as $\gamma\mu\mu\circ$ is demonstrated by another letter from the Monastery of Epiphanius in which an ass was described using the same terminology (P.Mon.Epiph.487), as well as by a seventh/eighth century letter in which a transaction involving a foreign camel was discussed (O.Vind.Copt.254).

More straightforward references to strangers exist in both Greek and Coptic non-official contexts. For example, Besodorus writing in Greek to Theophanes (see below) saw it as a source of disquiet that he had to find out from strangers how his friend was (P.Herm.6). He complained to Theophanes (who was away on a trip) about this, and was clearly annoyed. In a Coptic seventh/eighth century letter a contrast was drawn between home and the house of a stranger (O.Vind.Copt.286; Figure 53). The writer was keen to please the recipient, addressing him as ‘your brotherliness’, and asking him to make known his requirements. The writer alleged he would fulfill his needs ‘whether you are in the house of the stranger or in your own household, you will not lack for anything’ (lines 14-7).

An awareness that assignation as a stranger immediately consigned someone to a status lower than that of most other sectors in the population, a potential destabilising force, meant that strangers expressed gratitude for kind treatment, and were apparently surprised to receive it. For those who were beneficent towards strangers, it was an extra source of praise, and indeed, such action could be understood as Christian. A

phrase in a letter written by a group of strangers summarises the situation: they were strangers, yet their hosts were kind to them, and this was repaid through the strangers not fulfilling their stereotype; ie they caused no harm to their hosts or to their churches. They wrote (P.Mon.Epiph.171): 'we are strangers and you accepted us because of God and we ourselves have not done evil to you or to your churches'. An individual called Andreas, who identified himself as a stranger, asked the recipient, a deacon, to remember him simply because he was a stranger: 'you know I am a stranger' (P.Mon.Epiph.192). This status derived from the fact that Andreas had only arrived at the monastery recently.

When in the home locality, the status of stranger was discarded. Thus complaints were voiced by those forced to be away from home. This is seen in two Greek letters. The first, a fourth century letter from Oxyrhynchus appears to mirror closely Butehamon's complaints when away from Thebes (see Chapter 3), despite arising from an obviously far-removed context. In this letter (P.Oxy.XLVI 3314; Figure 51), Judas wrote to his father and to his wife, and expressed his distaste for being in Babylon. He had had a riding accident whilst away from home, and asked that his father and wife come and help him home (lines 16-9). Even though Judas was only in the Egyptian Babylon (see Rea 1978, 103), he wrote as if he was far further afield. It was far enough.

The second letter, written in Greek during the fifth century by a woman, Tare, demonstrated that it was the presence of family, of friends, which made a non-familiar locality habitable (P.Bour.53; Winter 1933, 159). Tare wrote to her aunt expressing her unhappiness at being in a place called Apamia, possibly the well-known town in Syria (Collart 1926, 103). Her mother had just died, and Tare wrote about her ensuing loneliness. Her troubles were two-fold; she was now alone and in a 'foreign place'.

No such eloquent complaints were made by someone forced to be away from home on government service (P.Bal.187). This Coptic letter from Bala'izah describes the

attempts of the writer to be released from service. In the first five lines of the letter, the writer addressed a whole selection of individuals along with their children, asking them to pray for him. He also requested that prayers were made on his behalf in the monasteries and churches of his home village (lines 4-5, also Kahle 1954, 601, footnote 6). It was only after this introduction that he began to describe what had happened to him whilst away from home: 'God desired and I went to Babylon, through God's will being safe. I brought the letter in to the governor and God desired and I was released...' (lines 5-8, see also Kahle 1954, 600). God's role in his fate was continually emphasised and the rest of the letter related further attempts of the writer to be released. There was no explicit statement by the writer of any unhappiness at being away from home. Nevertheless, his concerted attempts to be released from service alongside his desire to reassure his friends and family and ask for their prayers indicate that he would have preferred to be at home.

The condition of being away from home, of being amongst those who were unknown, and of thus being a 'stranger' was one to be feared. It was felt whether inside or outside Egypt, and assisting someone in such a condition was to be praised. Ways in which absence from home could be eased included letter writing as well as the provision of letters of introduction to someone forced to travel (see Leyerle 2000, 458-63 for the perils of travel). The condition of 'being a stranger' was sometimes imposed by the state as a punishment, as seen in the various exiles (within Egypt) endured by Athanasius. Siwa Oasis was one of the destinations to which people could be exiled (Kuhlmann 1998, 173).

Others imposed on themselves a state of exile in order to fulfill a religious need. In Samuel of Kalamun's life (see above), Samuel expressed great joy that God was to accompany him to Scetis (Alcock 1983, 3, 39, 77, 119). No longer would he be a stranger, wandering by himself away from his home surroundings. Two martyrologies from ninth century manuscripts, depict the condition of being a stranger as so hard that

to have undergone it was a source of extra praise. In the martyrdom of Paese and Thecla, Paese was told by an angel that there were three achievements which merited sainthood: having been a stranger, martyrdom and chastity (Reymond and Barns 1973, 70, 177, 81 Ri). All three Paese had either achieved or was about to. The same criteria, with the exception of chastity, were presented to Shenoufe and his brethren (Reymond and Barns 1973, 88, 190, 107 Ri 10). Their martyrdoms were to be carried out in a strange city. The hardships of being a stranger were thus acknowledged. The letter writers discussed above seem to have shared in such feelings.

The delineation of the world was utterly dependent upon the perspective of the writer. Egypt was now just one of many states undergoing a chaotic and increasingly decentralised political situation, in the midst of which Egyptians found different foci even when centralisation was re-established following the Muslim conquest. Thus a superficial Egyptian/non-Egyptian dichotomy only had a very limited relevance, due to the divisions in the Egyptian world, not only on the basis of status/occupation but also on the basis of religious identities.

A unifying feature amongst letter-writers was the willingness to perceive the world in terms of order and disorder, with barbarians/Persians/strangers (the interpretation of these labels flexible) a source of disorder, and with the desire to maintain order paramount. It was not necessary to subscribe to pharaonic ideologies of chaos vs order to perceive the world in similar terms: the differences (both between pharaonic and Coptic Egypt and between those living in Coptic Egypt) were the solutions to chaos. In Coptic Egypt these could be assessed as subscribing to the correct belief system, be it Christian or non-Christian, or to ensuring the imposition of power, Roman, Byzantine or Muslim. It was such solutions which created outsiders, and which defined the world.

The apex of the ordered world

The apparently single focus provided by the king for New Kingdom Egyptians was not reflected in the Coptic period. Religious and political power were not united in one figure. The religious world was one of openly competing and fundamentally opposed beliefs, in which different leaders tried to assert influence and authority. Authority on a political level was similarly asserted by the different echelons of bureaucracy, which did not need to share the same belief system as those under their control. In many of the letters which survive, the writers show a sense of hierarchy and social position. The care which New Kingdom Egyptians had to address those with any power is likewise demonstrated in Coptic period letters, in which formulaic phrases of respect were also central.

Establishment of hierarchy

The relationship between the writer and the addressee was established through set phrases, in which the addressee was often hailed as one far superior to the writer. This was common to letters derived from Christian as well as non-Christian contexts, and has been seen as a central aspect to Coptic Egypt in which patronage was the main form of social organisation (MacCoull 1989, 502). For example, in a fourth century Greek letter (possibly from Hermopolis - Rees 1964, 5) Anatolius, a follower of Hermes Trismegistus wrote to Ambrosius (P.Herm.3; Figure 55). Whilst clearly stating his own social position ('chief prophet'), Anatolius wrote to Ambrosius with great respect, terming him the 'foremost of the wisdom of the Greeks and one who is pleasing and beneficial for us' (lines 4-6). He ended the letter by asking that Hermes Trismegistus and all the gods 'bestow happiness on you for ever'. This letter forms one of several of the same archive. Despite the writers showing great respect for those they were addressing, they never termed themselves as unworthy to approach the addressee.

In many of the Christian letters, often derived from monastic archives, the writers presented a view of themselves as unworthy individuals. This emphasis on the humble self, in contrast to the elevated status of the recipient is inevitably reinforced through the monastic context of the letters. Their content was dictated through their purpose: often the writer was approaching a monastery for assistance or with a business proposition. The necessity for humility may not have been so great when writing to individuals outside the religious hierarchy: humility as an aspect of self seems to have been particularly marked for a Christian seeking to live correctly. In the context of the Monastery of Epiphanius material, it was thought 'sufficiently clear that this epithet of humility belongs, with hardly an exception, to the clergy and the religious' (Winlock and Crum 1926, 129).

A sixth/seventh century Coptic letter from Wadi Sarga (O.Sarga 109) is representative of this type of letter. The writer apologised for asking for assistance whilst at the same time elevating the status of the recipient. For example, the writer stated that: 'I know that I have been daring in that I have written to your most holy and honoured fatherhood, in excess of my worthiness'.

Language such as this could also be used between people of apparently similar status, who nevertheless asserted their humility: for example, a letter from Djeme was written to a bishop by a bishop (O.Crum VC 39; Figure 56). In this the ordination of a priest was discussed, and, presumably because the writer, Isaac, was seeking a favour, he addressed the recipient, Michaias, with extreme respect. Isaac was asking that Michaias accept the priest, having previously refused him. Thus Isaac referred to Michaias as 'your angelhood', 'your goodness', 'your sanctity' and he signed the letter 'from Isaac, this humblest bishop'.

References to worshipping or kissing the feet of the recipient were a central technique in elevating his/her status. Such phrases are common to both Coptic and Greek letters,

and were not exclusively used for addressing members of the church hierarchy. When writing to a member of the military bureaucracy during the sixth/seventh century, an individual (Christopher) wrote that 'in writing this I very greatly worship and kiss the footsteps of my master until we meet' (P.Oxy.LIX 4006). This letter was written in Greek to a comes named Theodorus, and was solely concerned with military uniform, yet such emphatic expressions of loyalty and respect were not out of place in such a context.

Similarly, in a Coptic business letter, addressed to a monk (Apa Georgios), the writer, Kosma, expressed his respect for Apa Georgios in equivalent terms (P.Fay.Copt.25). This letter was among manuscripts found by Petrie during his excavations in the Faiyum, which were dated by Crum to between the beginning of the eighth and the early ninth century (Crum 1893, vi). Kosma wrote to Apa Georgios about a cloak and a solidus, and began the letter by emphasising his respect for Apa Georgios: 'Before everything, I greet and kiss the dust of the feet of my patron, lord, father, and all the people who are orthodox'. His respect was offered to those who fitted within his own world view, which was at variance with the world-view of those in power in Egypt. The two were able to co-exist. A reiteration of Kosma's apparently self-aware subservient relationship with Apa Georgios was provided later on in the letter, where Kosma asked Apa Georgios to 'command your son and your slave' if he had any other requests.

The archive of the Monastery of Epiphanius contains numerous letters which record the subservience and humility of the writer in contrast to the elevation of the recipient, with the writer desiring to kiss the feet of the recipient (see P.Mon.Epiph.113; 239; 411). A typical example is represented by letter no. 431 (P.Mon.Epiph.431). This was written by Apa Victor to Apa Psan, and was apparently about a boy who was to be sent to Apa Psan. In this Apa Victor wrote that 'Before everything I do obeisance to you and I kiss

the dust of the feet of your fatherhood which is holy until the good God makes me worthy to see your angel [sic] face to face' (lines 1-3).

A more exaggerated example is seen in letter no. 164 (P.Mon.Epiph.164) in which the writer stated that 'I lick the dust of the feet of your goodness'. Alongside addressing members of the Monastery of Epiphanius as 'your angelhood', there were also references to the 'perfume' brought about by the actions of such people (for example see P.Mon.Epiph.163; 247; 354). A townsman wrote to a monk in the monastery expressing gratitude: 'our whole town is filled with perfume after your lordship spoke about the temptations which the hater of mankind has carried out' (P.Mon.Epiph.216).

A further technique for reinforcing the seniority of the recipient was for the writer to denote him/herself as a 'slave', as seen in Kosma's letter above. In both Greek and Coptic, however, the words for 'slave' can also be translated as 'servant', therefore it is hard to interpret the exact implications behind such protestations (see Crum 1939b, 665a where ⲉⲃⲗ is translated as both servant and slave). There would not have been the same clear-cut distinction between 'servant' and 'slave' as is in modern terminology. The blurring of categories was similar to that seen in the New Kingdom (see Chapter 2).

Use of such language occurred in letters from the fourth century as well as later. Sirivianou (1989, 133) singled out a fourth/fifth century Christian Greek letter (P.Oxy.LVI 3862) as being 'remarkable for the exuberance of its pious language'. In it, Philoxenus wrote to his parents and his uncle, calling himself 'your slave and worshipper'. He was writing in order to thank the recipients for their letter, for presents which included honey and olives, and to let them know about his health. He also asked that his greetings be conveyed to a list of people, including a nun. The letter ended with a request for prayers, listing the names of five saints. Philoxenus sought to reinforce his pious status, and referred to his father as other writers referred to their

patrons, or ecclesiastical superiors. This is seen in the address of the letter, where Philoxenus wrote 'To my most honourable father Zoilus [from] your slave Philoxenus in the lord God'.

As stated by Sirivianou, Philoxenus' letter appears to have been exceptional, but this language was also seen in other types of letters. Theophilus, writing in Greek to his employer John, in the sixth century, called himself a 'slave of your magnificence' (P.Oxy.I 140). A further letter from Oxyrhynchus, dating to the sixth/seventh century, leaves questions as to whether the letter writers were slaves in reality, or not (P.Oxy.LIX 4008; Figure 52). This was written on behalf of some estate workers, who used the term παιδάριον to refer to themselves. This is a word on which there is no general agreement - literally it means a young child, but could also be used to mean slave/servant (Handley et al 1992, 184-6, note 2). It was written by this group of people to their landowner, and they showed the same humility as those writing in Coptic to monks from the Monastery of Epiphanius: 'First we kiss the feet of our good lord. We ask you, lord, give orders to receive the little fish to the esteem of your "slaves". For we know, lord, that we cannot find anything worthy of your status'. A much shorter letter (of uncertain date), written in Coptic by Pisrael to a bishop showed a similar subservience: 'I do obeisance to my lord and father, who is honoured in every way, your slave Pisrael' (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I. 52, 6).

Sinful self as opposed to virtuous other

Alongside the expressions of humility when dealing with anyone perceived to be of importance, ran declarations of sinfulness on the part of the letter writer. In this, the recipient of the letter was requested to aid the writer in removing his/her sins - yet ultimate forgiveness was acknowledged to come only from God - inevitably the apex of the world for Christian writers in Egypt.

Amongst the archive of Meletian letters, recorded in copies, was a letter written in Greek to Apa Paeious recording an urgent need to have his sins forgiven (P.Lond.VI 1917; Figure 57). The letter, as with others from this archive, dates to the fourth century, and provides an eloquent example of the denigration of self in contrast to the elevation of another. The writer stated that he was 'lowly and afflicted and unworthy to look upon the light of the sun, so that God may [cancel] the decree of my sins by your most secure and most holy prayers' (lines 6-8). He went on to relate that he had also written to monks in Lower and Upper Egypt to secure more prayers for the forgiveness of his sins. Thus the writer could call on those more worthy than himself to ask for forgiveness for his sins from God.

Such themes appear again and again in Coptic letters as well. Letter writers directly identified themselves as sinners in contrast to the much more perfect state of being achieved by the recipient (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 57, 2 14081; P.Mon.Epiph.208). On a pottery ostrakon (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 23, 4) someone asked that the recipient 'be so kind and remember to pray for me, so that God forgives me my sins as they are hindering me...'. The text breaks off at this point; Hall (1905, 31) restored and translated the last section of the letter as 'dragging me down to Hell'.

In an attempt to emphasise his sinful state, Teras in a letter from Djeme (thus dating to some point before the end of the ninth century) identified himself as a dog. The letter was written to Apa Frange (see Chapter 5 - Frange lived in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna), and in it Teras repeatedly asked for prayers. He concluded his letter (O.Medin.HabuCopt.137; Figure 54) by thanking Apa Frange for his letters: 'I rejoiced very much indeed with my whole heart because you remembered a dog which is dead and which stenches, a worthless and rejected sinner. Farewell' (verso lines 4-11).

A similarly dejected message was put across by an individual writing to someone in the Monastery of Epiphanius, who claimed not even to be worthy to approach the footprints of the recipient. This letter (P.Mon.Epiph.140; Figure 58) was sent in order to organise the writing of a book for a novice, nevertheless the writer's inferior position was clearly conveyed: 'Oh brother, forgive me that I am a careless person, and I am not worthy to do obeisance to the prints of the feet of your holiness. Forgive me for I am a gossip and I have written many words which are not my measure' (lines 27-31).

Despite such expressions of utter submission to those perceived to be superior, there was also the expectation that such allegedly superior individuals do something in return. It was a two-way process, much as in the New Kingdom where an individual would be hailed at the same time as being criticised or asked for help, without hypocrisy (see Baines 2001, 18-20). These forms of address and denigration of self were not merely naive, unthinking 'respect'. This was seen above with reference to carefully phrased business letters, but was also seen in other contexts. For example, one Coptic letter from Karnak (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 54, 1; Figure 69) was superficially solely written to accompany gifts presented to members of the church hierarchy. Yet the writer still felt able to ask for prayers and holy water in return: 'Be so good as to remember to lift up your hands which are holy and place your shadow over us, and send a little water of blessing so that I can throw it on the animals which are ill' (lines 6-12).

Even during this period of change and political uncertainties, those actually living in Egypt seem to have had a clear idea of how their world was structured. Those who demanded respect and reverence were, as in the New Kingdom, those who held religious authority, political control or who were in a position to affect the lives of those who approached them. Thus it was possible for the father of a family, for a local landowner, for a military overseer, for a monk or for a bishop to be addressed with similar phrases of adoration. For each individual, there could be a different focus to his/her world, ranging from an employer to an ascete. Moreover, the majority of these

letters contain no mention of a political power: that was distant and of no apparent relevance to the functioning of life, especially given the overwhelming monastic context of the letters.

Differentiation within the Egyptian world

The variety of life patterns followed within Egypt at this period meant that merely living within Egypt's geographical borders need not have provided a primary sense of identity. This was similar to the position in New Kingdom Egypt, where, even though there was a central government and a distinctly Egyptian ideology, Egyptians could look more to the local environment and to their own networks of family, friends and business contacts for a sense of belonging, of self. The contrast of physical environments was just as strong in Coptic Egypt, and the living conditions differed greatly from place to place. Urban life in Alexandria, or in one of the originally Greek towns, was distinct in many ways from life in Upper Egypt (Krause 1981, 53). Yet different geographical settings did not prevent apparently disparate groups of people sharing in belief systems and a world-view.

The formation and maintenance of communities

The liberal use of kinship terms in letters created communities of people with shared beliefs, and helped to maintain them. At times these kinship terms did reflect an actual family relationship, at others, not (for example, see P.Brookl.19; P.Oxy.LXIII 4365). A fourth century Greek letter (potentially between Christians, as divine providence was addressed) included a long list of people all referred to by kinship terms (P.Oxy.LVI 3859). Horigenes, the author of the letter, wrote in order to inform the recipient, Sarapammon, that he could not meet up with him as had been arranged, but half the letter is a list of people whom Horigenes greeted. Sirivianou (1989, 120) commented that 'altogether he salutes fourteen "brothers", five "sisters", two "mothers", and one

“father”, who at this inconspicuous place in the catalogue is hardly likely to be his real father. This illustrates very well the widespread use of the terms of family relationship’.

Protestations of kinship abound in clearly non-Christian letters as well (Sirivianou 1989, 116; Rees 1964, 7), for example, amongst the fourth century Greek letters of Theophanes, from Hermopolis (see above). Two individuals, John and Leon, wrote to Theophanes, addressing him as ‘our beloved brother’, and the sole purpose of their letter was to greet Theophanes and wish him good health (P.Herm.4; Figure 59). In the middle of this letter, they passed on greetings from a number of people, presumably those who shared in their religious beliefs: ‘all the brothers who are with us and Dionysius from Attinu, who met you at Athribis, greet you’ (lines 8-11).

Despite the differences in belief between communities in Coptic Egypt, the same modes of expression could be used. Thus amongst the Greek Meletian letters of the fourth century, a strong sense of community was provided, in similar terms to the non-Christian letter above. For example, Pennes wrote to Apa Paieous describing their physical distance but also their proximity provided by their shared religious beliefs (P.Lond.VI 1919). He noted how they ‘shall be called Christians in Christ’, and sent greetings to Apa Paeious and his brothers.

Such expressions could be made in either Greek or Coptic, by the same communities, as shown by a further Melitian letter written in Coptic either from or to Apa Paeious (for discussion of this see Bell 1924, 94). In this the writer identified the recipient as a ‘soldier of Christ’, as ‘my father and my beloved’, and went on to greet the different monks (P.Lond. VI 1921). In one late fourth/early fifth century letter both Greek and Coptic were used, the majority of the letter in Greek, with five lines in Coptic (P.Amh.II 145). This letter was written by Apa Johannes and addressed to ‘my beloved brother and blessed in God, Paulos’.

This sense of kinship between like-minded people persisted through this period. In the sixth century archive of Dioscorus, his father, also a monk, was greeted in a Coptic letter as 'my beloved honoured brother' (P.YaleCopt.1; MacCoull 1988, 9). A further letter from this archive (P.YaleCopt.19; Figure 61) suggested a unity provided with Christians outside Egypt: 'Be so good as to remember me, and remember all the brothers and fathers and the whole people of God' (lines 5-6).

A genre of letters identified amongst the Greek sources is the letters of introduction, in which someone would be recommended to another, on the basis of religious belief. Such letters tended to follow a set format (Naldini 1968, 127; Sirivianou 1989, 111-4), and provided a guarantee of a welcome for a stranger. A fourth century letter (P.Oxy.XXXVI 2785), written to a priest of Heracleopolis asked that he received 'in peace our sister Taion' (see lines 4-7). A further fourth century letter (P.Oxy. XXXI 2603; Figure 70) sent greetings from one community to another, referring to each other as 'brothers', but at the same time asking that a group of people be treated well: 'therefore, receive them in love as friends, for they are not catechumens' (lines 25-6). The request went on to state their credentials; they were to be treated well because they were associated (perhaps in a monastic context - see Harrop 1962, 135) with two named individuals, and the request concluded with a quote from the New Testament (lines 27-9). Harrop (1962, 139) understood the care with which these individuals were recommended as arising from the disputes between different Christian groups, when 'the ground of a man's acceptability might be his relationship to certain persons rather than his place in a widely settled order'.

Such letters enabled individuals to travel across different parts of Egypt, from one community to another, making a journey both safer for the individual and reinforcing connections between religious groups. One letter was understood by Sirivianou (1989, 114) as a 'general letter to be presented to the local clergy at each stop on the journey'.

In this letter, from the fourth century, a woman was recommended, referred to as 'our daughter' (P.Oxy.LVI 3857). Sirivianou's interpretation of the purpose of the letter arose from its address 'my beloved brothers and fellow ministers in every place'.

Just as the letters of introduction required fair treatment for an individual on the basis of a shared belief, so too did other letters on a variety of issues demand action by appealing to a shared Christianity. A monk called Sasnos was encouraged to help out a group of people in debt, by someone called Harpocraton (P.NagHamm.68). This Greek letter of the fourth century, reused in the bindings of the Nag Hammadi texts, made it almost impossible for Sasnos to refuse: 'be diligent, beloved one, and help the brother, for thus it is fitting for your love of Christ'. A similar impossibility to refuse was created in a letter written in Latin and Greek to Pascentius, during the fifth/sixth century. Pascentius was urged by the writer, Theon (who may have been a priest), to treat an old woman and her son with due respect and fairness. Theon told Pascentius to look into her case carefully, assess the situation and help the woman out 'as a Christian should' (P.Oxy.XVIII 2193).

The construction of places of worship for Christian communities was inevitably encouraged as a devout action, as communities laid down visible witnesses of their presence on the physical landscape of Egypt. Didymus, writing in Greek in the fourth/fifth century (P.Oxy.LIX 4003; Figure 62) wrote to Athanasius, encouraging him to act with no delay in the building of a church: 'By your god in heaven, as you shall find wives for your male children, above all, as I am your debtor for this great gift, dedicate yourself to the church!' (lines 3-11). Further encouragement for Athansius was provided by the statement that this work was for the sake of both their souls.

Language as a device of exclusion

As has been seen, there was a broad unity of expression across different groups of people, and across this period. For these individuals, their sense of belonging was reinforced through written statements of shared beliefs. One further set of documents may suggest the actual manipulation of the written form of the language in order to provide a distinct identity. Those who were unable to read this written form of the language, despite being literate, would have been excluded. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind Bagnall's warning that 'a text, or even a whole library of texts, does not make a sect or a community' (Bagnall 1993, 304).

Yet it is hard to understand this selection of documents, written in Coptic and published by Crum, as anything other than representing a specific group of people, with a distinct set of beliefs (Crum 1940). These documents date to some point in the eighth century (1940, 3), and despite being composed in Coptic were actually written out with the Greek script. Two of the documents were letters, covering the usual range of subject matter. For example, letter no. II (Crum 1940, 10-12, plate II; Figures 63-4) was written by Macarius to David, and included very warm greetings as well as a discussion of business matters.

Such a total avoidance of the Coptic script when writing a number of documents in Coptic is unusual. Even those sounds which are exclusive to Coptic were instead rendered by a combination of Greek signs. Crum understood this as signifying that the texts were written by Egyptians whose first language was Greek but whose knowledge of Coptic was not very great. The logical conclusion of Crum's argument was thus that the texts arose from a Greek speaking sectarian community, for example the Melkites (Crum 1940, 5).

It appears surprising, however, that the format of these documents should have been put down to an inability in the Coptic language. The more complicated stage of the language, ie its grammar and structure, had been mastered by those who wrote the texts. Surely the script represented the least problematical aspect of the Coptic language, and working out how to represent Coptic letters with combinations of Greek letters must have been challenging. Rather than stemming from a group of people with little knowledge of Coptic, these documents appear instead to have resulted from an intimate knowledge of both languages, purposefully manipulated. What that purpose was, however, remains unclear.

An alternative viewpoint was put forward in an analysis of the many Coptic dialects (Kasser 1966). In this, it was argued that these texts were actually written in a dialect, named 'dialect G' (Kasser 1966, 106). The only evidence for this 'dialect' stems from the above texts. Kasser concluded:

'Le dialect G, malheureusement fort mal attesté, ne saurait être considéré simplement comme un bohairique d'orthographe anormale, produit par l'élimination des lettres non grecques de l'alphabet copte, pour des motifs idéologiques; ses particularités graphiques, très nombreuses, dépassent le cadre de cette explication, et suffissent à faire de lui un dialecte authentique' (Kasser 1966, 112).

Could not the formulation of a dialect arise primarily out of ideological considerations? In a contemporary context, the disenfranchised living in Parisian suburbs have manipulated the French language, creating a dialect with which they can provide a vivid witness to their sense of exclusion from mainstream society (Goudallier 1998).

The familial

The same respect with which those in Egypt addressed their political and religious superiors was expected to be shown by children towards their parents. Thus letters exist in which parents complained that they had been neglected by their children as well as letters in which parents were referred to very much as superiors.

Amongst letters of complaint written by parents to apparently neglectful offspring is a fourth century Greek letter written by two individuals, Psais and Syra, to their son (P.Oxy.X 1299). They complained that he had not visited them for a long time, and mentioned that they had both been ill but had now recovered. To reinforce the point that their son's visit was long overdue, Psais and Syra informed him that they were waiting until his arrival to kill the pigs. Maria, writing in the fourth century, similarly accused her son Papnuthis of neglecting her and ignoring her instructions (P.Oxy. XLVIII 3403; see also P.Oxy.XLVIII 3396 for another letter from Papnuthis to his parents).

In another letter, also in Greek, a son responded to his mother's complaints that he had not written to her enough (P.Oxy.LVIII 3932). Paul had been away from Oxyrhynchus, but had only received one letter from his mother. This was despite the fact that she had written to him more often. He explained this, and showed a very respectful attitude to his mother, calling her 'maternal kindness' and 'most revered and most well-born lady mother'.

The respect shown by Paul to his mother was mirrored in a letter written by two sons to their father whilst they were staying in Alexandria (P.Ryl.IV 624). The letter stems from the pagan archive of Theophanes from Hermopolis (see above). Hephaiston and Horigenes wrote to Theophanes, their father, in order to thank him for taking them to Alexandria with him. They had been left by themselves in Alexandria after their father had gone, and they told Theophanes about how good his reputation in the city was, and how they had benefitted from it. The editors (Roberts and Turner 1952, 114) commented that the secondary purpose of the letter may have been 'to prove that the tutor whose guiding hand can be discerned throughout was earning his salary'.

The vulnerable

In certain situations, parents were inevitably unable to fulfill their responsibilities towards their children, despite the importance in which the family was held. It was sometimes necessary for parents to sell their children, as slaves/servants, or to donate them to a monastery when other means of support became impossible. The protection of orphans, denoted as such when a child's father had died, and of widows, was seen as a necessary and worthwhile activity.

For a member of the Melitian community in difficulty, those sharing his beliefs were encouraged to help. This is shown in a letter dating to 330/340, written in Greek but with the address in Coptic (P.Lond.VI 1915). This was written by Herieous who described the financial problems of Pamonthius. He also asked for assistance to be given to Pamonthius, who was a wine dealer, and had fallen into debt because of over-taxation. The debts had grown so much that his creditors had sold his possessions and taken his children to sell as slaves. The aim of the letter was to help Pamonthius pay his debts, enabling him to buy his children back. This case was reinforced in a second letter (P.Lond.VI 1916) in which Moses and Herieous wrote again. The lack of details in this second letter perhaps indicate that it was written to be circulated round the community as a whole (Bell 1924, 76).

When parents could no longer afford to support their children, then actually donating them to a religious community could ensure their survival and safety. Legal documents record the process of donation, as do letters in which a monastery could be thanked for taking in a child. Apa Victor wrote in Coptic on behalf of parents who had donated their daughter to a monastery. In the letter they expressed their gratitude to the monastery (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 66, 1).

The vulnerability of those whose father/husband had died was acknowledged. In letters these people were frequently discussed, as is shown by a series of Coptic letters, some of which were very brief. In one fragmentary letter (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 45, 1) orphans were associated with other weak members of society such as poor women and children, and in another a nun, Maria, wrote to Kyriakos the Hermit about a male orphan. She asked for Kyriakos' prayers for the orphan, describing the orphan as 'little' and wrote that the boy's father had died, entrusting him into her care (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 81, 23).

An ostrakon from Djeme recorded the wish of the letter writer that the recipient treat orphans well (O.Medin.HabuCopt.141). In this letter, Victor (who identified himself as a priest) wrote to Damianus, asking that he be kind to the children of the now deceased Stephen. Their fatherless state was identified as a prime reason for being kind to them: 'you know that they are orphans'. A similar letter, written by Apa John to Apa Isaac asked that he take pity on a widow and her children, referred to as orphans (O.Theb.28). The respect that could be gained from obeying such requests is shown by the way in which a superior was addressed in a sixth/seventh century Coptic letter. The individual addressed was referred to as the 'father of orphans and the judge of widows' (P.Ryl.Copt. 297).

One of the most visible forms of self-identification seen in extant Coptic letters was as a pauper, and poverty-stricken people formed a distinct sector in society, often listed alongside orphans and widows. Assisting those in need could be an act of piety in itself, as in the case of orphans. Letters written by paupers, or on their behalf, were often addressed to monasteries, and they appealed for help, explicitly delineating their position with no glamorisation of poverty.

In the Theban context, letters reveal an environment in which a sizeable proportion of the writers needed assistance to survive, or claimed to. One monk was complimented on the way in which he had looked after the poor, as a prelude to a request for help for

Phantup, 'for indeed he is a very poor man and is very much in need.' (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 62, 5). On another ostrakon (O.Theb.32; Figure 66), a picture of a man begging was drawn below a letter in which the recipient was asked 'be good to the poor man Atri' (lines 4-5). In the Monastery of Epiphanius were found a number of letters in which help was asked for those in need (for example see P.Mon.Epiph.165; 173; 188). To have fallen into poverty from having once been a wealthy individual could be viewed as worse than having always been poverty stricken. This is suggested by one of the Monastery of Epiphanius letters in which an individual's former status was perceived as making him a more worthwhile case than others: 'for he is a great man's son who has come down to poverty' (P.Mon.Epiph.185).

As the boundaries between the poverty stricken and the wealthy could change, so too could those of another vulnerable group, the ill. Those suffering from ill health wrote letters, describing their situation, asking for help. Just as a group of people were motivated into caring for the fatherless so they tried to help the ill (see for example, O.CrumVC 78; O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 19, 3).

Two letters (of the fourth century) from the Nag Hammadi bindings, written in Coptic, dealt with the sickness of an individual, Aphrodisios (P.NagHamm.C4; C5; Figures 67-8). In the first, Daniel wrote to Aphrodisios expressing his sympathy: 'For I heard that you were ill with a great sickness and my heart was in great pain' (lines 5-6). In the second, Aphrodisios discussed his illness. His letter may have been addressed to Sasnos, and it addressed business matters, yet the end of the letter ended emotively: 'for I do not know what will happen to me, whether I will come out of the body or whether I will live' (lines 9-10).

The kind of sympathy that such letters evoked, was also hoped for in a sixth century Coptic letter explaining the reasons for a non-payment of taxes (MacCoull 1992, 106-109, II). This letter, from Dioscorus of Aphroditos's archive, was written by Moses to

Phoibammon and Dioscorus. Moses explained that it had not been possible for taxes to be paid in full as the people in question were ill. The context of the letter was understood by MacCoull (1992, 109) as 'a famine and consequent wave of sickness in the Aphrodito area in the aftermath of a raid by nomadic Blemmyes'.

Certain responses to ill health revealed the religious priorities of the sufferer and his/her helpers. Sometimes ill health itself, and any recovery, could be attributed to the workings of a divinity. Ambrosius, part of the circle of the pagan Theophanes of Hermopolis, was unable to see Anatolius, as he had hoped (P.Herm.2 - Greek fourth century). He wrote to Anatolius, informing him that this was partly because one of his daughters was ill. The cause of her illness was assigned to the divine world: 'for one of the gods in wickedness brought these to me'.

Two further letters attributed successful recoveries to benevolent divine intervention. The first, a fourth century Greek letter, was written by a servant to his superior (P.Oxy.VI 939). His mistress had been ill, and the servant wrote that they needed to thank God because he had listened to their prayers and saved her. A Coptic letter, of the eighth century from the monastery at Bala'izah, was written by a couple to their son (P.Bal.245). They informed him that his mother had been seriously ill but 'God raised her up'.

The particular perspective of the writer also affected the perceptions of death, and the advice given to those who had been bereaved. Images of death abounded in Coptic literature, and the metaphor of death as a symbol of current difficulties found its way into letters as well. For example, an individual, Constantine wrote to Apa Epiphanius about the festal letter (P.Mon.Epiph.131) and commented that 'the afflictions which surround the world now and the death which is over us have almost made me a corpse' (lines 3-4).

The bereaved could be seen as a further vulnerable sector in society, and could be encouraged to put their suffering into a religious context. Thus among Greek texts, a grouping of 'letters of condolence' has been made. Only twelve or thirteen such letters survive, four from the time-span covered in this chapter (Chapa 1998, 15), and they all encouraged the recipient to put sorrow in the past. For example, in a fourth century letter, Alexander commiserated with his brother on the loss of his son (P.Princ.II 102; Chapa 1998, 130-7, no. 9). Whilst expressing sympathy, Alexander was also keen to assert that life must continue, and began a quotation from the 'blessed Paul' (the rest of the letter is lost). In the fifth century, the inevitability of death was reinforced by Theodorus, who wrote to Canopus on the death of his wife, asking 'what can we do against humanity?' (lines 6-7, P.Oxy.LIX 4004; Chapa 1998, 139-47, [no.11]; Figure 60). Similar feelings were expressed in a sixth/seventh century fragmentary letter, which was written in biblical terms throughout (P.Oxy. XVI 1874; Chapa 1998, 149-59). Thus the recipient was encouraged through the reminder that those who had died were now with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This association of the dead with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also appears in Coptic texts (see Cramer 1941, 43).

Condolence letters exist in Coptic as well, in which there was a similar desire to locate the dead with the patriarchs, and to comfort the bereaved with the aid of biblical quotations (see for example BKU III 398). At the same time, expressions of grief could be eloquently expressed as shown by a letter written to someone whose daughter had died (BKU III 397). This loss was perceived to be all the more terrible because she was an only child, and the writer said that his eyes were flowing with tears as he wrote.

As demonstrated by the above letters, whole communities were maintained and supported with little reference to the state, or to the wider environment of Egypt. Religious beliefs as propagated in texts were used by letter writers to encourage correct behaviour towards different categories of people identified as needing assistance.

Facing apparent ideological failure

Any pockets of ordered life in Coptic Egypt were constantly under threat. During the New Kingdom, the state took responsibility for maintaining and putting forward a structured, ordered society, in which political and religious authority were broadly united. Despite the apparent clarity of pharaonic ideology, deviations and failures were expected and dealt with. In Coptic Egypt, with life patterns which were at times in total contrast to those with political authority, there were variant views of what constituted deviant behaviour. Yet, as in the New Kingdom, such behaviour was expected and did not appear to threaten or undermine the ideologies themselves.

The struggle to maintain a Christian identity

For Christians in Egypt, there was an ever-present vigilance for that which threatened to diminish their Christianity (see Bell 1986). These threats were personified as Satan, and in letters throughout this period individuals requested assistance in combating Satan. When an individual failed in that struggle, then a community could deal with him/her in various ways, the most serious of which was demotion to an outsider, excommunication. Such struggles, following the Muslim conquest, were of little concern to the political powers, and were often conducted on a very localised basis.

Thus when an individual was reprimanded for misdeeds, the cause of them was assigned to Satan. Struggling against Satan was a fundamental aspect of the Christian, especially the ascetic, life. This is particularly shown in a Coptic letter probably written by a bishop to a cleric who had been failing to live up to the ideals of a Christian life. In this the writer understood that everyone was subject to the wiles of Satan (O.CrumVC 45; Figure 71). The writer emphasised the omnipresence and the threat posed by Satan, beginning his letter: 'for this is our prayer at all times that the Lord help us to get rid of every disagreement which Satan, the plotter against us from the first,

scatters around, wanting to put up a stumbling block for each one of us through his neighbour' (lines 1-7).

Exclusion

Serious failures were met by excommunication, and there are many letters recording both the imposition of demotion to outsider status, and pleas to be reinstated, accepted again. A whole series of letters involving an individual called Shenoute record this process. These derive from the religious community at Bala'izah, dating to the late sixth/seventh century to eighth century. The letters were written by Shenoute, and preserved in the monastery's archive (P.Bal.188-91).

Shenoute's pleas for acceptance highlight the boundaries which could be imposed by a monastic community, and the unhappiness of an excluded member. In his letters he fully acknowledged his wrongdoings, and took care with the composition of each letter. For example, he wrote (P.Bal.188; Figure 72): 'I, this sinner and disobedient one, I know that I have transgressed all the commands which you laid down for me and I am guilty in every sin' (lines 2-5). Then, in the same letter, he went on to ask that he be allowed to return to live in the same monk's cell as before. Perhaps realising that this would not be possible, Shenoute asked that his former fellow-monks at least pray for him: 'I implore you by God that you do not throw me out from you in your prayers' (lines 14-5). A promise that he would not be disobedient again rounded off the letter.

The futility of his pleas is demonstrated by two further letters, in which the economic as well as the spiritual pitfalls of exclusion from a monastery were made clear. In letter no. 189 (P.Bal.189) Shenoute asked to be remembered in the monastery's prayers, and then in letter no. 190 complained about his financial situation. Shenoute left unspecified his difficulties, calling them 'great tribulations', but did specify that he had no money (P.Bal.190).

The apparent resolution with which his monastery dealt with him suggest that Shenoute's transgressions had been serious. In that case, the response to ideological failure was expulsion, bringing with it not only spiritual unease but also financial uncertainty. Shenoute's situation was by no means unusual: in the immediate context of Bala'izah, there is a letter recording the attempts of Basile and Pishote to be readmitted to the monastery (P.Bal.202), which followed a similar pattern to Shenoute's letters.

The desperation felt by an individual upon exclusion from a religious monastery is matched by the clarity of expression in the letters of excommunication themselves, leaving little or no room for manoeuvre (see for example O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 25, 4; O.CrumVC 77). Bishops were often responsible, as a point of last resort, for reprimanding, and if necessary, excommunicating a member of a religious community. Thus Bishop Abraham wrote in Coptic to expel a monk from the church (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 46, 4), and either an archimandrite or a bishop wrote to an individual (in Bala'izah) informing him 'behold you are excluded from the holy mysteries' (P.Bal.234).

Such demotions to outsider status did not, however, need to be permanent. This is suggested by a letter from the Monastery of Epiphanius (P.Mon.Epiph.158) in which the writer stated that he had expelled a deacon. This expulsion was temporary, pending the outcome of an investigation into his behaviour. It was also possible for monks to leave a community against their superior's will, to choose to become outsiders, an action which could inspire recriminations. Serapammon, the head of the community of the 'rock of Apa Thomas' wrote in Coptic to the archimandrite of another monastery in the seventh/eighth century about some monks who had absconded (P.Ryl.Copt.289; Figure 74). The letter is in a fragmentary state (see Crum 1909, 137). One of the statements which is still clear is the request that the recipient is restrained in any

punishment because ‘your most pious fatherhood knows the storms of youth.’ (lines 7-8).

The fear of excommunication was such that the threat of expulsion was used by those in authority to impose their will. A priest, Senetom, was commanded to celebrate a service by his bishop who wrote: ‘if you do not go, you are excluded from the clergy’ (P.Mon.Epiph.154). It also meant that letters contained endless blessings against being led astray. A Coptic Theban letter concerning a request for wood and camels also asked that ‘the Lord blesses you and protects you from the tricks of men and the snares of the enemy’ (lines 13-15, O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 71, 1; Figure 75), and a sixth century Coptic letter written to Dioscorus of Aphrodito by a monk asked that many blessings be bestowed on Dioscorus including that he be kept from all evil by the Lord (MacCoull 1991, 23-6). Similarly, the condemnation of those who had failed was harsh. For example, Helias wrote to his mother (in a Coptic letter from Naqada) and mentioned someone who bore the ‘curse of God’ (O.Brit.Mus.Copt.I 55, 1). Another individual, in a letter found at the Monastery of Epiphanius was warned that he was (or perhaps will be) seen as pagan and godless (P.Mon.Epiph.485).

Ideological dissent was a familiar feature of Christian life in Egypt, from its origins onwards. Alexandria during the time of Athanasius is renowned for the violence which could ensue between opposing Christian factions, as each struggled to assert their beliefs, and as Athanasius tried to assert his authority over the whole of Egypt (Brakke 2000, 1104). A letter, from the Meletian archive, reveals what it was like to be part of a religious group condemned by another (P.Lond.VI 1914; Figures 76-7).

This letter probably dating to May-June 335, was written by Callistus described the inflictions imposed upon himself and his fellow Meletians by Athanasius and his followers. It was addressed to Apa Paieous and Patabeit, and provides a vivid image of the impact of conflicting beliefs. Callistus told how Athanasius’ followers, with a

group of soldiers had tried to arrest Isaac, Bishop of Letopolis, along with Heraiscus. Having failed to arrest Isaac and Heraiscus, the soldiers beat up four Meletian monks. Heraiscus, an individual who is not mentioned in any other sources, has been identified as the Meletian bishop of Alexandria and thus was a direct rival to Athanasius (Hauben 1981, 453). Further restrictions imposed by Athanasius on the Meletians were also enumerated by Callistus, which included the imprisonment of a bishop, priest, deacon and Heraiscus himself.

The inevitable anxiety caused by opposing beliefs was such that writers were keen to establish their orthodoxy. Thus one writer (in Coptic) mentioned the Diphysites, Sabellians, and the Simeonites, but instead chose to identify himself with the words of 'Athanasius, Cyril, Basil, Gregory, all our holy fathers' (O.Crum.VC 44).

Public disorder

Religious dissent was not the only aspect of Egyptian life in which ideological failures threatened. Often the most visible way in which political authority of any sort asserted itself over the Egyptian population was in the collection of taxes. Resisting attempts to collect tax was a frequent form of dissent across Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt. It is not surprising, therefore, that many Egyptian letters deal with attempts to collect tax, and punishments for those who resisted, as different authorities tried to maintain an ordered state. This is illustrated in the two Greek letters below.

A letter could be a forum for a discussion of appropriate punishment. For example, in the fourth century an Oxyrhynchite letter records the misdeeds of some government officials. Chaeremon wrote to Dorotheus to inform him that some comarchs had been arrested. Some of their colleagues had protested so much at these arrests, that they themselves were also arrested, and others had gone missing. A possible solution to the

crisis was that the wives of the imprisoned comarchs be arrested instead, and the comarchs released (P.Oxy.XLVIII 3409).

An actual victim of attempts to divert the correct collection of taxes recorded a series of incidents carried out against him (P.Leid.Inst.69; Figure 65). This late fifth/early sixth century letter (from either the Hermopolite or Oxyrhynchite nome) exists only in a fragmentary condition, but it appears to indicate a plot to commit fraud. The dispute was between tax collectors about the amount of grain which they had received. Part of the letter reads 'the landowner was drugged so that he would accept more' (line 5). This translation of ἐφαρμακεύθη as 'drugged' was justified by the editors on account of the context (Hoogendijk and van Minnen 1991, 248).

Tax collection still remained a problem following the Muslim conquest. The remaining part of a Coptic letter from Bali'azah records the warnings given to a corrupt local tax official by his superior in the government treasury (P.Bal.256; Figure 73). Only the last five lines of the letter remain, in which the official was told that he had to return that which he had unfairly levied. The letter concluded with the words: 'shame by the will of God and peace be unto you'. This last phrase, 'peace be unto you', formed an essential part of Muslim letters (see above and Kahle 1954, 684) but here is used in a Christian context, as signified by the cross at the end of the letter. In a further letter from Bali'azah, a Muslim writer made clear his non-Christian beliefs through omitting the statuary cross at the beginnings and ends of letters instead using two diagonal strokes (P.Bal.185).

Other more visible ways of subverting the state, of expressing discontent, included actual riots, physical violence against people and property. One late fifth century Greek letter described a riot at Lycopolis (P.Oxy.XVI 1873). Its florid, literary style led the editors (Grenfell, Hunt and Bell 1924, 64) to speculate that 'it is doubtful how far the writer can be taken seriously'. What the letter does record, however, is the dismay

with which such riots could be met. The writer, Martyrius wrote to someone he addressed as his father. He commenced his letter by stating how the 'riots and the madness' were still on his mind. The actual description of the riots was very vivid, and he related how his wife and daughter just managed to survive.

Political disturbances outside Egypt could reverberate within its borders, as is perhaps indicated by a letter (P.Oxy.LVI 3872) which may refer to a military rebellion against the emperor Maurice in 602 (Sirivianou 1989, 167). This letter was written to Theodorus, in Oxyrhynchus, from an individual temporarily in Alexandria. The writer informed Theodorus that he had arrived safely in Alexandria, and also noted that he had written in a previous letter about the 'disturbances': 'we have already written to you about all the disturbances which were set in motion in the great army and at Constantinople'.

The fear of localised violence during the Coptic period was very real. Letter writers frequently lamented that they had been attacked. In one such example, the victim described his attacker as a 'lawless transgressor' (O.Mich.Copt.4; Figure 78). This letter was written in the seventh century, in Coptic, and the attack was carried out by an individual called Ammonius who was alleged to have been drunk when beating the victim. Sometimes such letters were written in order to gain some kind of retribution, a recompense, monetary or otherwise, for having been attacked. This may be why, in this example, as much was made of the attack as possible. Fear of an attack led one individual to write to someone called John, stating that it was impossible to go out from home: 'I cannot find a way to go out and leave my house as I may be robbed' (lines 2-4; P.Mon.Epiph.222; Figure 80).

Despite the desire to minimise violent activities, threatening individuals seems to have been a routine way of attempting to force them to do what was wanted. A late sixth/seventh century Greek letter addressed certain business issues, including how

much barley should be given out to the labourers (P.Amh.II 153). The letter ended with a threat, that God destroy the recipient's soul if he destroyed the sender 'concerning this register'. A more directly physical threat was made by someone who was owed money. This eighth century Coptic letter ended with the threat that if the money was not repaid 'I shall send the one who will bring it out of your bones' (P.Mich.Copt.15; Figure 79).

Various methods were utilised in trying to suppress criminal activities, depending on who had been the victim, and at the same time ardent letters in defence of the criminal could be written. Those in the church hierarchy could be both a source of help for the criminal as well as the bestower of punishments. The serious, but frequently committed crime of desertion from the army was the subject of a letter written in Greek by the Bishop of Hermopolis in about 346 (P.Lond.II 417). He appealed to Abbineaus, the Roman official in Dionysias (in the Faiyum) to show leniency to Paulus, a soldier who had deserted. He asked that Paulus be forgiven for his crime.

A series of Coptic letters from the Monastery of Epiphanius record eloquent appeals written by those undergoing punishment (which may itself have been administered by the monastery). One writer asked to have his stocks removed - he had had them on for three days (P.Mon.Epiph.181), while another asked how long he would have to remain in irons (P.Mon.Epiph.219). Another letter, written by two people, one of whom was named Thecla, records their complaint that they had not been visited (P.Mon.Epiph.177). They described their situation, claiming 'for we gave our life for you, behold you have forgotten us' (lines 8-10), and asked for food. As with all of these letters apparently written by prisoners in dire situations, this letter appears unrealistic (see Crum and White 1926, 201), especially in its conclusion. If food was not brought to the prisoners, then 'as the Lord lives, we will take six soldiers and come north and hand you over together with all your affairs' (lines 22-6). Thus prisoners were apparently able to access writing materials (or those who would write letters for

them) and ensure the delivery of the letters, when they allegedly were, for example, in stocks.

The monastery of Epiphanius letters are mirrored by a Greek letter, of about the sixth/seventh century, in which an individual, Justus, wrote to his superior, George, asking for some of his salary (P.Oxy.LVI 3870). Justus was imprisoned in Heracleopolis (his crime was not specified) along with some of his friends. He described their hunger, and complained that they had had to sell all their possessions, including their cloaks. George was urged on to action through the statement that Justus and his companions would otherwise die of hunger.

Despite the threat that criminal activity posed to ordered life, there was a willingness to defend the alleged or convicted criminal as well, to shelter him/her either from the state or from church authorities. For example, in a fifth century Greek letter from Hermopolis (P.Herm.48) which survives only in a fragmentary state, the writer defended the actions of someone charged with attempted robbery. In another fifth/sixth century Greek letter (P.Oxy.XVI 1832) a village headman was reported as having sheltered a female robber. She had stolen property from the church, and had later sought, and found, sanctuary with the village headman who had protected both her and her booty. This letter is an official one, it reported the situation and demanded that the church treasures be retrieved and that the woman be arrested if necessary.

In some cases, however, no defence would have been possible. For those who tried to elude political authorities, evading military service, tax duties, or arrest for crimes committed, the punishment was severe. This is demonstrated in series of letters (dating to around 710) from the Aphrodito archive concerning a group of fugitives (P.Lond. IV 1384). In one of the letters, the governor of Aphrodito wrote to the pagarch describing the punishment to be given to the fugitives. Upon capture they were to be whipped

forty times, restrained in a kind of wooden apparatus whilst marching, fined and all their accomplices fined as well.

Bishop Abraham wrote (in Coptic) in very severe terms to a culprit who had possibly stolen from a church (O.CrumVC 40). Bishop Abraham had heard that the recipient had gone into the church of Apa George and had caused disruption within it. The letter concluded with the threat that all those who had committed the crime would be excluded 'from communion with his whole house'. Once more, the threat of exclusion, temporary or otherwise, could be 'as great, if not greater than the threat of imprisonment. Both types of punishment, however, resulted in an individual being designated as an outsider, a threat to society.

Conclusion

The Coptic textual world is far-removed from that of the New Kingdom. Explicit expressions of disdain could be made by an individual for those sectors of Egyptian society which did not fit in with that individual's view of the world. Covert means no longer needed to be used to vocalise, in literary form, discontent and disagreement with other ideologies, including the official beliefs of the state. It is also possible to trace the ideas of individuals, such as Besa, in different types of sources. The writers of tales and of less literary texts did not need, or want, to be anonymous. Furthermore, the struggle for self-expression in a world which was fragmented meant that self-assured statements abound.

The uncompromising picture of the world presented in hagiographical, polemical or apocalyptic sources seems to have extended into the actual experiences of the Christian life in Egypt. Thus individuals vocalised their inability to live up to Christian ideals as laid out in hagiographical texts, and those in the church hierarchy attempted to provide authority, guidance and inspiration in the Christian world. Serious failure by a

monk/nun/priest to abide by certain requirements could result in excommunication, which was as painful as physical punishment.

So influential was Christianity, that it affected individuals' self-perception, and self-presentation, whether in a religious community, or outside. Statements about the sinful state of the writer, and requests for prayers to be put to God on the writer's behalf, became sometimes the central and even the only message of a letter. The predominant context of survival, in monastic archives (especially those of Thebes), no doubt over-emphasises the role of the religious, and the effect of Christian beliefs, on the lifestyles of the wider population.

Yet letters from non-Christian contexts have also been discussed in this chapter. These differed little from Christian letters of the same period, containing similar expressions and aspirations. Likewise, it was possible for Christian letters to include phrases normally used in a Muslim context. Letters seem to have formed an essential system of interaction amongst and between communities, whatever the ideological context. Despite the claims of difference made by certain Christian leaders, it was not possible to exclude contact and interaction between those with different beliefs. Indeed, Shenoute's vehemence against heretical texts, was, on one occasion stimulated by the very presence of such texts within the White Monastery.

A certain fluidity of beliefs is demonstrated by the terms used for the despicable 'other' in Egypt. Persian, barbarian, stranger, pagan were terms used in a variety of contexts throughout the Coptic period. They could be used generically, to signify sources of disorder, or with more specific meanings covering ideological dissent as well as an actual physical state of being. Frequently, their use was utterly subjective on the part of the writer, and would have had an entirely different interpretation if those signified by one of the above terms had read the text.

Yet, as in New Kingdom Egypt, self-definition was not solely dependent upon a pre-eminent ideology. That this was the case in two such different political contexts is significant, although it is clear that in the Coptic period it was more 'normal' to express difference (even though this could be met with arrest, exile or worse) than in the New Kingdom, where there was a much less diverse political and religious context. Whatever the political/religious environment of an individual it was nevertheless possible to prioritise more localised reference points as an aspect to self-definition - even when living during a period, such as the New Kingdom, in which an apparently blinkered, one-sided perception of the world seemed to dominate.

Thus, throughout the centuries of the Coptic period and across its belief systems, the home environment and family could be as central to the perception of an individual as his/her religious beliefs. Furthermore, an individual's status in society, whether vulnerable or wealthy, fundamentally influenced any perception of the world, and could remain little affected by whichever religious/political ideology held sway. Nevertheless, the decision whether to endure, to enjoy or to escape from such a situation could depend upon an individual's interpretation of any of the ideologies as expressed in the textual world of Coptic Egypt.

CHAPTER FIVE

COPTIC THEBES

From the textual evidence, a religious identity was a central aspect of life in Coptic Egypt, the focus of those with power and those without. The protection and promotion of the Christian life against those who refused to conform to it was seen as vital. In this chapter, one area in Upper Egypt, Thebes, is investigated with the aim of tracing the archaeological evidence for living patterns and delineation of space in a predominantly Christian context. I argue that the built environment of Thebes, as one of the foremost pharaonic cities in Egypt, provides an ideal test case for the impact of the past on Coptic self-definition. It also allows an evaluation of the influence of Christianity on the lives of Coptic Thebans, who included townspeople as well as those whose whole lives were determined by the desire to follow an exclusively Christian, ascetic life. The sharply defined world seen in Coptic period textual evidence can then be assessed in the light of the archaeological sites in Thebes.

Cities in Coptic Egypt

This period has been assessed as witnessing the decline of urbanism in Egypt, at least of a specifically Roman-inspired urbanism, with the seventh century a crucial turning-point (Alston 2002, 366-7). In this process both Islam and Christianity had a role to play. The focus of state sponsored urban development became Fustat (Kubiak 1982, 221) instead of Alexandria. Here, a new political and religious world could be developed for the conquerors (see Kennedy 1998, 64-5). Other urban sites, such as Babylon (just near Fustat) relied upon the permission of the non-Christian rulers (Abdel Tawab 1986, 324-5) for the continued development of religious structures vital to the administration and functioning of the Coptic church (see Gabra 1999, 113-4).

The different belief systems of those in Egypt have been viewed as having an effect upon the built environment of Egypt (see Haas 1997, 206-14; Bowersock 1996, 266 for the christianisation of Alexandria). But the relationship between religious ideology and the lived environment is complex. This is demonstrated by statements in Alston's work on the urban environment of Roman and Byzantine Egypt. On the one hand Christianity cannot be viewed as having exerted an exclusive influence on cities:

'Christianity was an extremely successful ideology, though one in which there were major doctrinal disputes, but one cannot assume that the fascination with Christian doctrine and history at the centre of the literary tradition underplays other social forces within the cities. In Gramscian terms, Christianity was the hegemonic ideology, but it did not supplant all other ideological forces' (Alston 2002, 125),

but on the other hand, Christianity was also cited as one of the reasons for the decline of the city in Egypt:

'The citizens were reintegrated with the villagers, now all Christians together, and the boundary between urban and rural ceased to have much meaning' (Alston 2002, 366) and 'The decline of the ancient city is, therefore, intimately related to a change in culture, one which undermined the carefully constructed sense of difference that had been integral to the Roman and Byzantine city. The city's claim on the identity of individuals was eroded. If to be a member of an early Byzantine community was to be Christian, then primary identity lay with the Church, and possibly the Byzantine state, but not local cities' (Alston 2002, 367).

Evidence for the built environment of Coptic Egypt stretches across the country (Figures 3-4), but often gives only a very partial picture of a settlement. It includes structures, which, though not preserved in their original state, are still in use today, such as the monasteries of Wadi Natrun, or the churches of Babylon. Frequently, it is the ruins of monastic/monumental structures which provide the only evidence for the existence of a settlement, such as the Monastery of Apa Jeremais at Saqqara (Thomas 2000, 44), and this has helped to create an image of Coptic Egypt as an environment consisting of dispersed clusters of settlement, with no real urban impetus. Thus Djeme, a settlement in western Thebes, was referred to by Alston either as a 'town' (2002, 85) or as a 'village' (2002, 304). These two terms create a very different image of Djeme

for the modern reader, accustomed to a hierarchy of settlements, and leave confusion as to what type of living environment Djeme was.

Certainly, settlement areas in Coptic Egypt differed greatly from their Roman or pharaonic counterparts. It is harder to slot them into the modern terms for settlements. The degree of urban planning alongside more spontaneous development as seen at New Kingdom Memphis is less easily visible in Coptic Egypt, where houses and monumental buildings closely adjoin, often piling up within older structures. This does not mean, however, that careful planning did not go into the settlements, or that there were not areas of high-density living in Coptic Egypt.

The caution which must be exerted when approaching this period is underlined by Thomas' insights regarding Late Antique Egyptian funerary sculpture. This body of material primarily dates to the period preceeding the Muslim conquest, and has shown that accepted boundaries between Christian and non-Christian, and between types of settlement in Egypt need to be re-examined:

‘Relations among city, cemetery, and monastery become, throughout the period, inextricably interwoven, and the tombs of urbans, both polytheists and Christians, are found in the same cemeteries sharing generic styles and formats. In other words, religiously defined communities were not entirely isolated topographically, nor did they create or maintain separate styles’ (Thomas 2000, 34).

Thebes

The settlements at Thebes have increasingly been used as source material for those interested in Coptic Egypt (see Wilfong 1999; Alston 2002). This is primarily due to the wealth of textual evidence which survives from this area, alongside archaeological evidence which, though not negligible, is much more limited. Thus in Wilfong's study of Coptic agricultural patterns in the Early Islamic period, Thebes provides the central reference point: ‘the western Theban area provides a large and diverse body of evidence for a Christian population for the century and a half after the Muslim conquest’ (1999,

218). In the fifth century, however, Thebes had still been a location for a number of prominent pagans (see Rémondon 1952, 67, 73).

This area was chosen as a suitable site for further investigation in this chapter as it saw a high level of occupation (which, in the case of the west bank, suddenly terminated): monks, hermits, nuns as well as those following a variety of non-religious occupations lived alongside each other in close proximity. It was also a location which attracted visitors and residents from beyond its immediate environs, both from Egypt and further afield. Thebes became, not for the first time in its occupational history, an active and thriving pilgrimage centre, an area for heightened religious awareness.

Thebes in the Coptic period raises similar issues to New Kingdom Memphis: questions of religious access, motivation, with a multiplicity of devotional locations as well as influences from outside Egypt. Thebes, however, was not a political centre of any importance by this period with Armant, a town 10 kilometres to the south of Thebes, being the political centre of the area. Direct links with Lower Egypt, the centre of political power for the whole of Egypt, were limited to rare visits to Alexandria (for religious reasons) by individuals from Thebes and to infrequent written communications (Winlock and Crum 1926, 99).

Thebes' apparent isolation did not mean that it remained utterly ignorant of religious and political developments. This is seen by the way in which the Bishop of Armant used to spend much of his time living in western Thebes, amongst those leading the religious life (see Winlock and Crum 1926, 105; Timm 1984, 159). Furthermore, the seventh century bishop of Coptos, John of Pistentius chose to live in Djeme (part of western Thebes) when contemplating whether to accept the post of bishop (Budge 1913, 281-4). The impact of political developments could be felt as well (see Chapter 4). For example, a document survives from Djeme, dating to the period after the Muslim conquest, which seventeen people from Djeme signed (Schiller 1932, 56-63, no. 6). In

this, they sought to reassure the government that money would be received in recompense for a man who had refused to carry out his *corvée* duty.

There are Coptic period remains, including monumental as well as residential structures, on both banks of the Nile at Thebes (Figures 81-2). The majority are located within and around pharaonic structures, in various states of preservation (see Doresse 1960, 30-1). Occupation of the west and east banks of the Nile had been more or less continuous since the pharaonic period. The east bank of the Nile at Thebes had been a centre for the Roman military, with a Roman *castrum* located within the Luxor temple during the 4th to 6th centuries CE. Tourists visited Thebes as well, in particular to see the pharaonic sites of the west bank, for example the Colossi of Memnon (see Chapter 4). During the seventh century CE, the residential areas of the west bank increased in size, and the district was to flourish until the ninth century CE, when the area was apparently abandoned. On the east bank, however, a bishopric was established by the eleventh century CE (Stewart 1991, 1484).

Western visitors to Thebes from the seventeenth century CE onwards depict the area as an empty and wild place, its role as a religious/political centre during both the pharaonic and Coptic periods apparently lost. For example, Pococke, visiting Egypt in the first part of the eighteenth century noted that ‘Carnac [Karnak on the east bank of the Nile] is a very poor village, in which the people have mostly built their cottages among the ruins to the south of the temple’ (1743, 91). The apparent abandonment of the area as a centre for Coptic religiosity is however, drawn into question by another traveller to the area, Curzon. In the nineteenth century he travelled to the Middle East to look for Christian antiquities and manuscripts. When visiting Thebes, he reported that:

‘on a rocky hill, perforated on all sides by the violated sepulchres of the ancient Egyptians, in the great Necropolis of Thebes, not far from the ruins of the palace and temple of Medinet Habou, stand the crumbling walls of an old Coptic monastery, which I was told had been inhabited, almost within the memory of man, by a small community of Christian monks’ (1955 [1849], 129).

Frustratingly he provides no further information on this, nor is there corroboration on this point from other authors.

The starting point

The most recognisable and well-known aspect of Egyptian Christianity is still its contribution to the ascetic Christian life. Whilst still part of the Byzantine world, Egypt's monastic movement provided inspiration and guidance to Christians from Egypt and beyond: 'there was almost a kind of tourist trade to the Egyptian desert, which seems to have been the chief attraction for foreign visitors at this time' (Hardy 1952, 87). This is epitomised by the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, which is a Greek text written as a travel narrative describing the journeys of non-Egyptian monks to the monks and hermits of Egypt. The journeys took place in the late fourth century, 394 CE (Chitty 1999, 51), and the text creates an image of an Egypt peopled by monks and hermits, as a place infused with religious experience. In the prologue to the text, the author states:

'I saw another vast company of monks of all ages living in the desert and in the countryside. Their number is past counting. There are so many of them that an earthly emperor could not assemble so large an army. For there is no town or village in Egypt and the Thebaid which is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls. And the people depend on the prayers of these monks as if on God himself. Some of them live in desert caves, others in more remote places. All of them everywhere by trying to outdo each other demonstrate their wonderful ascetic discipline. Those in the remotest places make strenuous efforts for fear anyone else should surpass them in asetic practices. Those living near towns or villages make equal efforts, though evil troubles them on every side, in case they should be considered inferior to their remoter brethren' (translation by Russell, 1981, 50, para.10).

The *Historia Monachorum* was a widely circulated and influential work, which sought to show the 'monastic world as a charmed biblical land' (Frank 2000, 29), and to demonstrate the rewards which could be received upon making the sometimes tortuous journeys to visit hermits in Egypt. An image was created by the author, and enlarged in order to achieve the aims of the text and Frank emphasised this in her discussion of the text. For example, she stated that 'Late Antique Christians were reminded of the

distance between themselves and the Egyptian monks whenever the author of the *History of the Monks* alluded to his identity as an outsider writing for other outsiders' (2000, 50).

Despite the obviously literary tone of the excerpt from the *Historia Monachorum* quoted above, several points are significant and of relevance when looking at the Coptic occupation of Thebes. First, the landscape of Egypt is pictured as one dominated by monastic communities and hermits, even in urban settings. Secondly, the population of Egypt is shown as being dependent upon such communities and individuals. Thirdly, Egypt's religious life is shown as being impressive to the non-Egyptian pilgrim. It was a worthy location in which to make pilgrimages. All these points are considered in the following assessment of the motivations and lives of those in Coptic Thebes.

Sources

Winlock and Crum, in their publication of the work at the Monastery of Epiphanius in the 1920s, provided an overview of western Thebes, with a short description of the different Coptic sites they encountered (1926, 3-24). This work was of central importance in establishing and recording Coptic sites, and still provides the only contextual study of western Thebes in the Coptic period. They also mapped the sites, and despite listing more than thirty sites note that: 'the community was much more populous than the map would lead one to believeand the reader must regard it as showing but a fraction of the sites occupied in the days of Epiphanius' (1926, 3). They attributed the loss of so many sites to various factors, such as the medieval and modern occupation of ancient sites.

One of the most significant factors, however, was the lack of interest generated in Coptic remains amongst archaeologists revealing the pharaonic sites of the west bank during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coptic sites in Thebes are still not a

priority for excavation, but small-scale excavations have been carried out and excavations focused on earlier remains do now report Coptic period remains as well. There has also been careful recording of Coptic graffiti. In this reconstruction of Coptic period Thebes, I draw upon excavation reports as well as first-hand study in the field, to provide an insight into what appear to have been the most significant areas of settlement in Coptic Thebes. The loss of Coptic sites means that the picture gained of Coptic Thebes is only a partial one, with the issue of how far these surviving sites are representative open to question.

The west and east banks at Thebes differ in their physical setting. The floodplain on the east bank is much wider than on the west bank, and the ancient sites of eastern Thebes are located within the flood-plain. Desert hills are set back from the river on the east bank, about 10-15 kilometres away, whereas on the west bank the floodplain is narrow, the desert hills an integral part of the floodplain landscape, being only 3-4 kilometres from the Nile (Strudwick and Strudwick, 1999, 9; Figure 82). Thus on the west bank, the Coptic sites of Thebes are to be found within the flood-plain as well as on the desert edge, and beyond.

One of the central themes in any discussion of the Coptic occupation of pharaonic areas is the automatic attribution of any destructive patterns within pharaonic structures to the Copts. Thus in the text below, the assessments of different archaeologists that a site of destruction was evidence of Coptic activity are noted (see section on Luxor). Frequently, however, that link is made without any actual foundation, and is just a presumption. The re-working of pharaonic structures includes many actions which are impossible to attribute with certainty to any particular period. These include pilgrim grooves, the partial destruction of statues, and erasures of figures in temple reliefs.

Throughout the pharaonic period, Egyptians adapted and changed their monumental surroundings. The excavation of Karnak has continually revealed the extent to which

the New Kingdom rulers obscured or destroyed the work of their predecessors (see Redford 1986), and the official areas in New Kingdom Memphis (see Chapter 3) were similarly re-worked. As seen in Chapter 3, even Khaemwese supervised destructive activities, despite being an individual specifically associated with the restoration of pharaonic monuments. Thus what today seems to be an action motivated by a lack of respect towards pharaonic ideals could have been carried out at any point in the past, including the pharaonic past.

Indeed, destruction and subsequent rebuilding was a central part to the ancient experience of the built environment. The dominant material used in Egypt for building was mud-brick, a material which lends itself to frequent rebuilding (Kemp 2000, 78). The mistaken political input which can be given to the interpretation of a destruction level in an archaeological excavation is demonstrated well by biblical archaeology. In the Israeli context, links have often been made to biblical events upon the discovery of an ash layer. This has then been thought to 'prove' certain episodes in the Bible (Yadin 1967, 258), an approach which has received much criticism (see Glock 1999, 330-6).

To a much lesser degree, archaeologists can be similarly affected by the vehemence of Shenoute's writings against pagans, and then automatically interpret the construction of a Christian building on top of a destroyed earlier structure as having resulted from an ideological clash (see section on Deir el Roumi). It has also been asserted that temples were systematically destroyed by Christians during the fourth and fifth centuries (O'Leary 1938, 55-6). Such interpretations are possible, but by no means certain (see Habachi 1972). I leave this possibility open through noting them in this chapter.

Graffiti written in Coptic/Greek/Syriac, often listing the names of monks, or the name of Christ, as well as Christian symbols, written on temple reliefs, or in tombs, can be linked to Coptic activity. The motivation behind such activities is nevertheless hard to access, and in some cases merely witnesses to the presence of Copts. For example, it

has been stated that the crosses on the house lintels at Djeme (see section on Djeme below) could have served an apotropaic purpose as well as testifying to the beliefs of those inside the house (Alston 2002, 119). Each of what now appear to have been the primary sites of Coptic activity on the east and west banks are examined in turn, according to location.

East bank

Luxor temple

Diocletian, one of the Roman emperors responsible for persecuting the Christians, and from whose reign the Copts commence their calendar apparently in memory of the era of Martyrs (see Chapter 4), had a shrine dedicated to the imperial cult built within Luxor temple (Baines and Malek 1992, 86-7). He also converted the complex into a castrum, as a way of imposing his authority and control following the Upper Egyptian revolt in 297 CE (Grossmann 1991, 1485). It was Diocletian's shrine which early travellers and scholars mistook for a Christian church, deceived by the wall paintings depicting the emperor and his co-regents (see Daressy 1920, 162-3; Meinardus 1977, 430-1).

Yet it was within and around this Roman castrum that the first material traces of Christianity in Luxor can be located, dating to the period after the Persian conquest (see El-Saghir et al 1986, 33). The total christianisation of this complex can be realised from visiting the east side (one of the sites of Coptic period habitation see Habachi 1951, 449, plan 1) of the temple. Here, engraved blocks, derived from excavations and from the successive clearings of the temple, are piled on top of each other, ancient Egyptian, Roman and Coptic all intermingled. Lintels, shell niches, capitals as well as much more fragmentary pieces provide evidence of Coptic monumental architecture within and around the Luxor temple. The images on these pieces frequently include a cross worked into a motif, such as a vine, and the cross is often surrounded by a circle, in raised or sunk relief (Plates 11-2). In the Coptic Museum in Cairo, as well as in the

Luxor Museum, there are many objects whose provenance is the Luxor temple, for example, a bronze eighth century lamp (Plate 14).

Churches were built in and around the Luxor temple, in close proximity, around which both monks and lay people seem to have lived and worked (see Grossmann 1973, plan 1). The earliest church to have survived and to have been excavated within the temple complex dates to the late sixth/early seventh century (Abdul-Qader 1968, 244-53, plates XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, CV, CVI; Riad 1968, 294-5; Grossmann 1986, 79; Grossmann and Whitcomb 1993, 30). Part of it is still visible today, and is located just outside the temple pylon, on the east side, where the sanctuary is all that has been left in situ (Grossmann and Whitcomb 1993; Grossmann 2002, 448-50). This is composed of engraved blocks, left haphazardly but following the basic plan of the sanctuary. Like the other churches found in Luxor temple, it was built along the basic basilica plan (Grossmann and Whitcomb 1993, 27-9), Abdul-Qader identified a baptistry (1968, 251). The location of the church, just outside the main entrance of the camp, signifies its importance (Grossmann 1986, 80), as it was built when the camp was still in active use. According to Grossmann and Whitcomb (1993, 30), the church also notable for the quality of its architectural decoration (the 'richest' in the Luxor region), and for containing within it 'newly manufactured decorative stones', something highly unusual for Egypt.

The whole of this area, to the south of the east pylon seems to have been a location for intense Coptic period activity, with the continual enlargement and re-building of existing churches, making use of the building material 'supplied' by the pharaonic temple (Abdul-Qader 1968, 253). When the mosque guesthouse was pulled down (built against the east pylon), Abdul-Qader discovered 'many ancient monasteries..the relics of which reached as high as the first floor of the guest house' (1968, 242).

The area to the north of the temple pylons, stretching into the avenue of the sphinxes, was a location for both residential occupation as well as religious structures. Abdul-Qader provided no more information on the 'monasteries', but extensive remains of mudbrick houses dating to the Coptic period were found in this area (Abdul-Qader 1968, 230-1, 265) and the potential for more Coptic period discoveries was noted (as one of the reasons for no further excavation): 'there could be nothing more than the relics of a Roman or Christian village as the excavations of nearby sites on similar levels did show' (1968, 231).

This seems to have been an urban environment, in which a careful re-working of the pharaonic and Roman surroundings was undertaken, involving both the destruction of ancient remains as well as their incorporation into Coptic buildings. Thus in the avenue of the sphinxes, an integral part of the pharaonic east bank landscape, the heads of the sphinxes were sliced off, an act attributed by Abdul-Qader to the 'early Christians' (1968, 232). Just to the east of the avenue of the sphinxes, another church was built, dating to the seventh century (Grossmann 1986; Plate 15).

No more than five minutes' walk separates the churches from one another today, although in Coptic times the density of occupation would have meant a longer walk; narrow streets had to be negotiated, monasteries walked round. Just south of these churches, but within the temple proper lies the best preserved church, directly underneath the Abou Haggag mosque (Abdul-Qader 1968, 260-1; Plate 16). This is also on the east side of the temple, within the northeast section of the court of Ramesses II (Grossmann 2002, 452-3). The walls on the south and west sides survive to a considerable height (4.80 metres on top of 1 metre of debris), almost to the top of the Ramesside columns, with a row of small rectangular windows near the top of the walls (see Abdul-Qader 1968, plates LXVIII, LXIX). Columns, which may have been used inside the church, were discovered in the debris (Abdul-Qader 1968, 261, plate LXXVI).

The date of this church is uncertain, Grossmann assigning it to the end of the sixth century (1986, 79), but in a later article noted that the earliest possible date was to the period after the Muslim conquest (1991, 1485), and this confusion is reflected in Wilkinson's recent work on the temples of Egypt in which he noted that this church was built in the sixth century (2000, 167). That this example of an early Christian church has survived at all is due to the fact that it was converted into a mosque - preventing it from being cleared away (see Abdul-Qader 1968, 260).

The three churches mentioned above would have been in existence simultaneously at some point in their history, although whether they would all have seen the same degree of usage as each other is questionable. Each of the churches was on the east side of the temple, and apparently aligned with one another. They may have served lay people as well as monks located as they were in the midst of residential and monastic 'districts'.

The remaining two churches which have been excavated were on the west side of the temple, situated close to one another (Plates 17-18). They were both built along the basilical plan, and were sizeable structures, as they were wide, with three naves. Daressy (1920, 172-3) excavated and cleared away the first, located just outside the court of Ramesses II. He recorded the well, which he thought was to provide water for religious ceremonies, and the baptistry, traces of which can be seen today. The design of the baptistry was unusual, different to that found in the church in the second court at Djeme as the basin was cylindrical, not octagonal (Daressy 1920, 173; Grossmann 1986, 80). The other church is situated to the south west of the first, just outside the colonnade of Amenophis III, and would have extended under the cornice (Grossmann 1986, 80). Three standing columns remain, as do some wall sections. The size of these two churches implies a dedicated and wealthy community served by them: this perception is heightened by Daressy's (1920, 172-3) discovery in the first church of some silver church equipment, for example a silver binding to hold the gospels with the

name of Bishop Abraham of Armant inscribed on it (Plate 13; Strzygowski 1904, 340-1).

Karnak temple

Karnak and Luxor temples were linked by an avenue of rams and the avenue of sphinxes in pharaonic times and later. As seen above, a Coptic residential and monumental area was built over the Luxor end of the avenue of sphinxes. The churches built along the east side of the avenue of sphinxes may have been paralleled by other churches on the route to Karnak. Within Karnak temple itself there is evidence of Coptic habitation, Munier and Pillet summarising the situation thus: 'le témoignage qu'une population chrétienne assez dense se groupait dans l'enciente abandonnée du grand dieu thébain' (1929, 58).

The continual use and incorporation into different belief systems seen at Luxor, also happened at Karnak. Neither site was at any point sterile or devoid of religious belief. The Ptolemies and the Romans made additions to the site, building for example, a temple dedicated to Opet. This was initiated by Ptolemy VIII and completed by later rulers including the Romans (Wilkinson 2000, 162). During the Coptic period, various sections of the huge complex of temples at Karnak were converted into Christian churches and monasteries (Munier and Pillet 1929, 61). Texts discovered in Djeme, western Thebes, make references to the churches and monasteries in Karnak temple, and they seem to have been in existence between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries (Munier and Pillet 1929, 61).

Much of the archaeological evidence for the Coptic occupation of Karnak has been lost, due to the excavation and restoration of the pharaonic period monuments (Coquin 1972, 170). Munier and Pillet documented what evidence there was, including evidence no longer *in situ* today (1929). For example, they noted the three residential areas

(possibly monasteries or simply 'lieux d'habitation chrétiens'); on the east side of the first pylon, between the seventh and eighth pylons, and between the ninth and tenth pylons (1929, 61, figure 2, 74-82, figs 6, 7, 8 15). The court between the seventh and eighth pylons provided the most evidence for a Coptic monastery - the holes cut in the eighth pylon to support the monastic structure (Munier and Pillet 1929, figure 7). Some of the Coptic period blocks, for example lintels such as those seen at Luxor temple, are stored in the storage area to the north east of the Temple of Khonsu (Plate 10). One area which recent excavation (Lauffray 1971) has revealed to have been a locus for Coptic period occupation is just in front of the first pylon, near the sphinxes. Here, the excavator speculated that the population was not christianised to any meaningful extent:

'La strata suivante paraît être encore romano-byzantine; on y rencontre des monnaies de l'époque de Constantin et des groupes d'amulettes pharaoniques qui donnent à penser que la Christianisation était alors superficielle' (Lauffray 1971, 124).

The most visible example of the christianisation of the Karnak temple is the church built in the Festal Temple of Tuthmosis III, at the far east end of the main temple complex of Amun. What is viewed as the Christian vandalism of this temple often forms part of a present-day guided tour of Karnak, the temple echoing with sometimes bizarre tales of its Coptic occupation. Through time, much of this church has been lost; but with the combined evidence of traveller's reports and work of early scholars it has been possible to get an idea of its extent. Coquin (1972, 170-77) has provided a detailed account of the church. He stated that the church must have been attached to a monastery (1972, 171, 174-6), due to an inscription (only partially visible today) on one of the columns of the temple (column 18 - see plan, Coquin 1972; Munier and Pillet 1929, 87). This lists the names of archimandrites, beginning with Shenoute, and Coquin stated that the function of the list was to act as an 'aide-mémoire' to the deacon who had to recite the names during the liturgy of the eucharist.

The columns of Tuthmosis' Festal Temple were an integral part of the church, transformed and removed from their ancient Egyptian past through paintings. The surfaces of the columns were covered with brightly coloured pictures, depicting saints from the Nile Valley (Plate 9). These paintings were large, about 1.5 metres high, with decorative borders as well, and each saint had a particular resonance to an Egyptian Christian, for example Saint Colluthus who was executed at Antinoe under the emperor Maximian (Munier and Pillet 1929, 64-74; Coquin 1972, 173).

More minimal traces of the Coptic presence in Karnak may be found in the Temple of Opet and in the Temple of Khonsu. Coquin identified what may have been a hermitage or a chapel in the Temple of Opet, in which a shell niche was located and where a few Coptic graffiti were written - names and a cross (1972, 178), and in the Temple of Khonsu there were a couple of longer graffiti (see Coquin 1972, 177; Munier and Pillet 1929, 62-4).

As at Luxor Temple, Coptic domestic and religious space was created within the pharaonic and later structures. The monasteries were located in the midst of the temples, and were served by sizeable churches, but non-monastic Copts also lived alongside, a pattern seen elsewhere in the Nile Valley, for example at Akhmim (see McNally and Schrunk 1993). These settlements continued through the Islamic period, with the Coptic character of the area maintained to such an extent that a bishopric was created there in the eleventh century.

West bank

In ancient times, Thebes was constituted by settlements on both the east and the west banks. The links between the two banks were heightened by the way in which monuments on the two banks were aligned with one another (Figure 82). Karnak was built on two axes, east-west and north-south, the east-west axis providing a direct

connection with Hatshepsut's valley and funerary temples on the west bank (see Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 54). Thus, during the Valley Festival, the image of Amun of Karnak could be conveyed from east to west, leaving the port at the temple of Karnak hidden in his barque, taken across the Nile and then on to Hatshepsut's temple (Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 78-9). Luxor temple was similarly built upon two axes, with the east-west axis apparently linked to Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramesses III on the west bank (Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 67). Luxor temple's north-south axis was reinforced during the Opet festival in which the gods Amun, Mut and Khonsu were taken in their barques from Karnak to Luxor and back again. By re-occupying these carefully aligned sites, and building within them their own monumental structures the Copts re-orientated their environment. Such a process would have naturally arisen as Christianity became the dominant culture in Thebes, and need not have resulted from conflict.

Both the Karnak and Luxor temples were extensively used by the Copts, the high concentration of religious structures, monastic communities and residential areas mirrored on the west bank, but to a greater extent. The high density of pharaonic monumental buildings on the west bank was reflected in their re-use by the Copts. The same reference points in the landscape persisted, but were endowed with different meaning. For example, monks re-occupied the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el Bahri, and could gaze directly across the Nile to the temple of Karnak and know that that also was inhabited by monks.

The visual links between the different Coptic settlements as well as the significance of their locations, on sites of historical/religious meaning, are particularly relevant when looking at the west bank. Here, monks, hermits and lay-people lived side by side amongst the dense monuments of the past, with only short walks separating the different locations.

Desert edge/floodplain settlements

Separating the types of settlement in western Thebes on the basis of their physical location: valley floor as opposed to desert imposes a perhaps unnecessary distinction between these two areas given their proximity. Yet Wipszycka (1994, 2) has pointed out that establishing the distance of a monk's cell or monastery from the cultivated areas is of central importance in understanding these settlements:

‘il faut essayer d'établir à quelle distance ce monastère ou cette laure se trouvait de la zone cultivée. Cette distance pouvait varier de façon considérable, et situation des moines vivant en bordure du désert différerait nettement de celle des moines installés à quelques kilomètres de la zone cultivée ou même beaucoup plus loin’.

Physical distance alone does not suffice to explain the different settlements. Some hermitages in western Thebes were close to the floodplain but located in remote rock cut tombs high in the cliffs. Western Thebes provides a particularly clear illustration of the interaction between the two areas, with a continuum between the floodplain and the desert. The desert monasteries and hermitages fulfill the stereotype of early monasticism, in which the desert was favoured as a residential location by those leading a religious life purely because of the physical difficulties inherent in living in the desert. Other reasons for the location of desert monasteries and hermitages have been cited. For example, Lane (1993, 294-8) has demonstrated the importance of the desert as a place of refuge, and also emphasised the impact of a physical outlook from a location - the vista was all important.

Western Thebes is rich in such physical locations, but it also provided a more urban setting for monastic endeavour (see Wipszycka 2000, 78 on urban monasticism), as in eastern Thebes. Goehring (1993) has shown, following a study of literary sources, that the urban as opposed to the desert setting for ‘ascetic practices may have been the more original’ (1993, 286). This is despite the early Christian and earlier belief that the desert was the location of truth, the city of evil (although the desert was also associated with death). As he noted, monastic settlements at western Thebes demonstrate the

continuing location of monasteries near to an urban centre (1993, 291). Examining the types of settlement at western Thebes and their locations addresses several issues - that of physical landscape, the interaction between urban and non-urban environments and the effect of a belief system on the built environment.

As far as it is possible to tell, all of the Coptic residential and religious areas were built in and around earlier structures, most of them pharaonic. Whether this was guided by a desire to overturn and destroy the memory of a non-Christian past, or whether it evolved out of a practicality (easily available building material) and a shared awareness of the sacred potential of the physical landscape (for example governing the desire to build on a hilltop which just happened to have been built on previously by the ancient Egyptians) is hard to assess. Furthermore, the extensive occupation of western Thebes during the pharaonic period and later made it hard to *avoid* re-occupying an earlier site.

In contrast, several authors have chosen to emphasise the self-conscious aspect to the change of use from non-Christian to Christian (for example Doresse 1960, 30-1; Alston 2002, 293-4). This is epitomised by Wipszycka (1994, 3), who wrote with reference to monasteries built on pagan sanctuaries in towns:

‘Choisir un tel terrain pour établir un monastère n’était pas seulement une commodité, mais une acte religieux: la nouvelle religion chassait l’ancienne, on suscitait aux démons des adversaires capables de leur résister’.

Djeme

This site, built as the mortuary temple of Ramesses III, had seen successive occupations following the end of the pharaonic era. By the time of the Coptic period, a town had been built within the outer walls of the temple, and within the actual temple, and the settlement pattern reflects that seen in the Karnak and Luxor temples. Before the clearing of the temple in the nineteenth century, much of Coptic Djeme remained, having been abandoned in the ninth century (see Wilkinson 1835, 45-6; Daressy 1897, iv; Hölscher 1934, 1). Hölscher undertook the excavation of a large proportion of the

remaining areas of Djeme, to the south east and to the north and west of the mortuary temple.

As at Karnak and Luxor, churches were built within the mortuary temple, and in its immediate vicinity. The largest of these was built in the second court of the mortuary temple, and followed the basilica plan, with columns of reused Aswan granite running down either side of the nave (Hölscher 1934, plate 32; 1954, 54, plate 45; Wilber 1940, 93; Badawy 1978, 66; Grossmann 2002, 455-7). As in the churches at the Luxor temple, this church had a baptistry and a well (Daressy 1920, 173). Today, a few graffiti and the destroyed Osiride statues of Ramesses III are all that remain after the removal of the church (Plates 19-20). The building of this church in the second court of the temple resulted in a high level of preservation of the temple reliefs, their colours preserved under a layer of whitewash, on top of which were wall-paintings.

Three other smaller churches were identified by Hölscher (1954, 51-7). One of these was built within the small temple, and its interior was decorated on two walls with paintings of the life of Saint Menas (Wilber 1940, 88, 90-1, 94, figure 11). The two other churches linked the mortuary temple area with its immediate environs; one church (a much smaller version of the second court church) was located outside the eastern fortified gate, and the other was in the temple precinct of Eye and Haremhab (Hölscher 1954, 55-6. plate 46, 23D; 1934, plates 9-10).

Residential areas clustered around and within these temples. By the time of Hölscher's excavations there were only two main areas of housing left for excavation, to the south-east and to the north and west sides of the mortuary temple (Hölscher 1934, plates 9-10, 32; 1954, 45). For the extensive housing which clearly had once existed inside the mortuary temple itself, Hölscher had to rely on nineteenth century photographs (for example Teynard 1858, plate 34) and on deduction from the minimal traces left after the exposure of the pharaonic remains (Hölscher 1934, plate 32).

Both the first and the third courts of the mortuary temple were extensively built in, thereby almost surrounding the church in the second court. The houses were multi-storied. On the basis of the doorways cut in the north wall of the mortuary temple, it has been suggested that each floor was lived in by a different set of residents (Hölscher 1954, 49). This suggestion links in well with the patterns of house ownership known from Roman papyri from towns such as Oxyrhynchus (Alston 2002, 67-75), and with actual archaeological and textual evidence from Djeme itself.

This is partially demonstrated by House 42 (outside the mortuary temple) which Hölscher thought had been built in two stages. It may have originally been two houses, later amalgamated into one as the household increased (Hölscher 1954, 50). Similarly, the reverse happened as well, with houses separated into more and more living units as they were re-divided amongst family members. This process was known in the Roman period, as at Oxyrhynchus, but is also documented vividly in a family archive from Djeme (Schiller 1953). This covered four generations of one family, who had kept the same house over this period. The re-divisions of the house had constantly changed its internal organisation, as different family members died and space was re-allotted.

Unusually for Theban Coptic period residential (non-monastic) remains, street plans for about one hundred houses (located outside the mortuary temple) exist. Here, narrow streets wound amongst tightly packed multi-storied houses (Hölscher 1934, plate 32; 1954, 45; Badawy 1978, 28-9; Alston 2002, 176), some of which led into dead ends. The density of occupation of these areas is shown by the width of the streets (1.10 - 1.80 m), the houses having at least two floors (of about two rooms/floor) without an open courtyard. Hence their modern designation as 'tiny structures' (Alston 2002, 121). The flat roofs of the mudbrick houses would also have been utilised for living space (Hölscher 1931, 53; 1954, 454-6). On the enclosure wall of the temple it is still possible to see some of these houses in situ (Plate 21), the houses on the wall only had

entrances opening inwards to Djeme, doubtless providing an extra degree of security (Badawy 1978, 105).

The impression given by the street plans of the town is one of dense settlement, dictated by function with the townspeople wanting to live in a secure location within the enclosure walls. Despite the apparent limitations on space, which resulted in dark living quarters crammed around narrow streets (Hölscher 1954, 53), there was also a willingness to embellish the houses, to create external features around their entrances. This is demonstrated by the stone lintels which now lie in a storage area on the east side of the mortuary temple. On these crosses, doves and rosettes were carved in raised relief, motifs which are repeated in graffiti across the west bank (Plate 22), and which are familiar from the east bank of Thebes. The lintels would have been placed above from doors of houses, setting out the religious identity of the residents (Alston 2002, 119). Such a custom was attested in the context of New Kingdom Memphis, where similarly unprepossessing houses may have been embellished with stone lintels on which the resident's name and titles were proclaimed (see Chapter 3).

Likewise, it appears highly significant that such a large area of the town within the safety of the enclosure walls was given over to religious space - to at least four churches. As previously noted, one of these churches was a considerable construction, the very reverse of the living quarters; spacious, with windows set high in the walls and stone, wood and granite the building materials. In the context of such a crowded settlement the church would have created an impression upon the visitor who was able to access it, reaching it from a multitude of dark streets. Indeed, it was a location which people from across the west bank travelled to (Winlock and Crum 1926, 128-9; Boud'hors and Heurtel 2002, 9 on the churches of Djeme as a possible destination for a monk), and a letter found in the Monastery of Phoibammon records the request from an official of Djeme that the recipient of the letter come to the church in Djeme (Crum and White 1926, 210-1). The enclosed, almost exclusive world in Alston's (2002, 176)

depiction of the residential areas of Djeme - 'if the ordered colonnaded thoroughfares of the Classical cities bespoke powerful urban administrations, so the intricacies of Kom el-Dikke, of the temple of Chnum and of Jeme represent communities knowable only to the insider' - needs to be countered by the columned religious buildings at the heart of Djeme which were open to those from outside the town's immediate confines.

Within Djeme, however, there may have been clusterings of different types of residential areas, serving those of differing social status. This is suggested by the variation in house size (but not in general plan) across the settlement, although as noted above, the actual house plans may conceal a wide variety of internal organisation. Thus larger houses may have had a greater density of occupation than smaller houses of apparently lower status. A specific status indicator may have been location. Proximity to the main church in the second court may have denoted status upon the resident, who could benefit both from the sanctity of the area and the extra security, being further away from the vulnerable outside edges of the town. Thus Hölscher thought that the officials of Djeme may have dwelt in this location (1954, 47, 49). It is not possible, however, to make any more definite conclusions about the possible existence of residential areas in Djeme. As a system of organisation within Egyptian cities, it is well-attested in earlier periods. For example, a fourth century city register from the city of Akhmim recorded the occupation of an inhabitant as determining a residential location (see McNally and Shrunk 1993, 8-9).

Djeme formed an urbanised area, the focus of which was a large church, but the lifestyles of the community are also attested by the detailed textual evidence found both at the site and in other locations on the west bank, and by the material finds. Both types of evidence testify to the participation of the inhabitants in forms of cultural expression, found across Egypt, as well as to the important role of literacy in the town.

The textual evidence, written on ostraca as well as papyri, demonstrates the structure of the town, and the frequent recourse to law as well as the importance of letter writing. The texts also illustrate the close links with the rest of Thebes, especially with the other settlements on the west bank maintained by the people of Djeme. They were found both in the town, and across the west bank, especially from the Monastery of Phoibammon (see Stefanski and Lichtheim 1952; Crum and Steindorff 1912). The legal documents are extensive, with monks in western Thebes functioning as administrators and scribes for the townspeople of Djeme, who recorded financial transactions on matters such as taxation (Crum and Steindorff 1912; Bucking 1997, 15-6, 20; Biedenkopf-Ziehner 2001).

The textual documents naturally emphasise the involvement of the religious in the lives of those in Djeme, given their literacy skills. Yet this relationship may also have been crystallised by the possibility that the town formed part of the lands of the Monastery of Phoibammon (Schiller 1932, 4). Furthermore, as noted by Wilfong (1999, 219-20), the townspeople of Djeme seem to have formed the primary agricultural work-force for the monasteries of western Thebes:

‘by the time of the Muslim conquest, there is considerable evidence for west Theban monastic institutions interacting with Jême residents in matters of land in farming; in general the pattern seems to have been for outside farmers to cultivate the monastic land, itself often donated to the monastery by town inhabitants’.

Given the integration of the monastic in the life of Djeme, as administrators, employers and sources of spiritual help, the frequency with which letters were addressed to the members of the monastic communities is hardly surprising (see Chapter 4). The inevitable bias of the monastic archives was balanced by the ostraca found actually within Djeme (Kahle 1955, 146). Here ‘the ostraca deal with the affairs of the townspeople, and only a few concern the desert monks and monasteries. Ecclesiastical matters are also rare; there is not a single letter from a bishop’ (Stefanski and Lichtheim 1952, 1).

The primary context of the finds at Djeme has been lost, but a variety of objects were listed by Hölscher, including pottery and metal objects (1954, 63-4; 74-8). Within the excavated area, however, no industrial area was discovered, although much of the pottery must have been locally manufactured. Much of the ceramic evidence was created for use within the domestic context, and was only minimally embellished (for example water jugs and cooking pots). When embellishment was present, then it drew upon motifs which were current all over Egypt, and which could be associated with Christian beliefs. For example, on the mud jar stoppers were seal impressions incorporating emblems such as a dove and a cross (Hölscher 1954, 61-2). Amongst the metal items, there was a similar focus upon function (for example knife blades). Silver bracelets (Hölscher 1954, 64-7) attest to an interest in personal embellishment, although they may also have served a functional purpose as well. Items identified as female figurines, made from baked clay, were also found in Djeme during this excavation, and immediately draw comparisons with patterns of material culture seen in RAT (see Chapter 3). Teeter (2002, 2-3) saw a continuum in the use of female figurines between the New Kingdom and the Coptic period. This was because figurines had been found dating from the reign of Ramesses III up until the ninth century CE, demonstrating 'the employment of female figurines in pious devotion for nearly 2,000 years' (Teeter 2002, 2). This statement is not without problems (see Chapter 3), yet it can reasonably be asserted that the Coptic figures showing women praying did have some kind of religious meaning for those in Djeme (Teeter 2002, 3).

Assessing the material evidence is complex, given the haphazard way in which Djeme has been destroyed and excavated. Hölscher's excavations were unsatisfactory, with no context for any of the objects found. Furthermore, much may have been removed from the site over the centuries and dispersed in museum and private collections as unprovenanced material (or with the general designation as 'Theban'). Thus it is unwise to conclude on the basis of the above finds that the investment in moveable

objects was minimal, and that the town was one with little social stratification. Amongst the occupations of those in Djeme, there would probably have been an emphasis on the agricultural. But alongside this there would have been the full range of activities associated with a densely occupied settlement. For example, a wide skill-base was drawn upon for the construction of the churches, which involved stonemasonry, carpentry and artistry as well as careful planning.

The number of residents of the town has been estimated at 18,860 making it almost twice the size of Edfu (Badawy 1978, 29). The use of such estimates, which are worked out on the basis of likely (but not known) multiples, is in allowing some kind of comparison with other urban environments. The extant evidence for this population creates an image of a town in which the Christian world impacted to such an extent that the greatest investment was in the places of worship. Unlike Egypt's non-Christian past, these were all dedicated to the same deity, and any influence of the religious beliefs of the rulers of Egypt did not find material form at this stage. Thus Djeme survives for the modern observer as a Christian town, in which Coptic was the predominant language, located in an Islamic world.

The town of Djeme would have been a well-protected and visually imposing settlement. The residents dwelt in a variety of locations in and around the pharaonic temple, some of which were more secure than others, with the large church in the second court in one of the most secure locations, surrounded by a maze of streets, and within the walls of the great temple. The town was located in the shadow of the Qurn, and much of the movement on the west bank would have been to and from Djeme. From the roofs of the houses on the outer parts of the town, especially from the houses built on the enclosure wall, it would have been possible for the residents to look out over the west bank, at solitary hermitages in the slopes and cliffs of the Qurn, at Deir el Roumi, Deir Kurnet Murrai and beyond (Plates 23-4). These were places which townspeople visited, taking supplies, pilgrims, receiving spiritual help, visiting family as well as

being places from where the monks/hermits came down to Djeme, attending services in the second court church, assisting in legal matters and overseeing the administration of the monastic lands.

Ramesseum

One of the paths leading from Djeme went along the valley floor, skirting the cultivated area, passing the Ramesseum after about ten minutes' walk (Plate 25). This site was the mortuary temple of Ramesses II, and as such would seem to have provided a setting for habitation and worship comparable with that of Medinet Habu. Yet the site as a whole had gradually lost importance, although between the 22nd and 27th dynasty it was used as a priestly necropolis. By the Ptolemaic period, the site was used as a source of stone to embellish Medinet Habu (Wilkinson 2000, 183; Lecuyot 2000, 121). This had a long history as the centre of urban activity on the west bank, and as such had been able to maintain the majority of its structures intact, unlike the Ramesseum.

Despite its diminished importance, the Ramesseum was nevertheless altered and adapted by the Copts (Lecuyot 2000, 122), although Lecuyot stated that the evidence does not point to 'l'implantation d'une communauté urbaine ou religieuse' (2000, 128). This is because any evidence is quite minimal, for example, only a comparatively small quantity of pottery was found (Lecuyot 2000, 128). However, a church does seem to have been built in the barque shrine (Leblanc 1994, 26; Lecuyot 2000, 124-7). The traces of this church include graffiti. Objects related to its use are still retrieved during the ongoing work of excavation and restoration at the site. Two of them were described by Leblanc.

The first was found on the north wall of the vestibule, in a ditch. It was a large limestone cross, almost half a metre high which had been 'assez grossièrement façonnée' (Leblanc 1994, plate A, 26, 31). Its size can be contrasted with another

much smaller cross, of sandstone also found in the Ramesseum (see Leblanc 1994, plate A). The second item described by Leblanc, a font, was also made from stone and was discovered in the foundations of the south wall of the second court (Leblanc 1994, 26, 311, plates A and B). It had been made out of a capital of a column, and was unadorned except for a small cross cut into its rim. These items indicate that 'des sculpteurs oeuvraient sur place' (Lecuyot 2000, 122).

Further indications of the Coptic occupation of the site remain within the great hypostyle hall, and the second court, where there are identifiably Coptic graffiti (Lecuyot 2000, 122-4). On the columns of the second court, the cartouches of Ramesses II were altered: a cross inserted into the sun disk above which the name of Christ was written. In the great hypostyle hall, a monk has left his name on a column, whilst on others a whole series of crosses were engraved as well as magical symbols (Plate 26). The graffiti are similar in style and content to others on the west bank. For example, figures of a monk with upraised hands were scratched into a column, one of the figures was seated on an animal. On the northern side of the entrance to the first hypostyle hall, crosses were engraved in a line, and now mingle with the graffiti of later travellers, such as Belzoni, and within the first hypostyle hall, there are a few further graffiti, possibly of Coptic origin. A further indication of the patterns of use in the Ramesseum include an eighth century ostrakon, a Sahidic letter, found in the ruins of the Third Intermediate Period necropolis on the west of the temple (Lecuyot 2000, 127).

Temple of Seti I

The path which leads from Djeme along the valley floor towards Dra' Abu el-Naga is situated between two contrasting landscapes, with the monasteries and hermitages on the west side, and the floodplain on the east side. The walk from Djeme to the mortuary temple of Seti I passes some of the most significant sites on the west bank,

and takes about 40 minutes (along the modern road). Seti I's temple can also be reached from the quarry settlement in a 25 minutes' walk. The sites of Deir el Bakhit, Seti I's temple as well as the quarry settlement link the main areas of the west bank with more distant sites around and on Thoth hill. Seti I's temple is surrounded by cultivated land today, and in the Coptic period houses were built within and around the temple buildings, and a church was built in its northern courtyard (see Wilkinson 2000, 174). The evidence left on the ground of this Coptic occupation is today limited to graffiti on the walls of the temple.

The erasure of the faces of deities and the king in the hypostyle hall is possibly attributable to the Copts. On the west of the hypostyle hall, in the sanctuaries (one of which was the chapel of Ramesses I), there are more graffiti, many of which seem to be magical. For example, on the door frame of the chapel of Ramesses I, there is a line of graffiti comprised of a cross, a person with upraised hands, a twelve pronged 'star' (with circles on the end of each prong) and other more damaged marks (Plates 27-8). The twelve pronged 'star' appears in various permutations on other parts of these sanctuaries to the west of the hypostyle hall. As a motif, it regularly appears in Coptic magical contexts (see Plate 61). For example, a papyrus now in the Cairo Museum (no. 45060; Plate 60) was found in Thebes, rolled up in a jar and buried under the floor of a monk's cell (Meyer and Smith 1999, 270-3). This text consists of a number of spells in which recipes were given to achieve certain results (such as cure eye disease, or to impoverish a ruler), and at the end of the list of recipes were drawings, two of which were similar in composition to those seen in Seti I's temple.

Magical beliefs were at the heart of the Coptic experience, as demonstrated by the location of the above papyrus. Thebes itself may have inspired a particular intensity of magical beliefs as, during the Graeco-Roman period, there was an apparently unusually high concentration of Theban magical texts (Tait 1995, 181-2). Magical texts form an important body of Coptic textual material, and were written upon ostraca and papyri as

well as on objects such as bowls. They covered a variety of subjects, including medical matters (see Meyer and Smith 1999). Often they form the most daunting texts to translate and understand, many remaining basically meaningless to the modern reader, even when a translation has been achieved. Thus with the magical symbols which are seen in this temple, as well as in many other contexts across Egypt, it is possible only to assert that they were magical. Nevertheless, they provide a reminder of that other aspect to religious beliefs in Coptic Egypt (Viaud 1978, 22-3), as had been the case in New Kingdom Egypt. Similarly, the sixth/seventh century Coptic papyri giving heavily magical agricultural advice led Wilfong to state:

‘the ultimate non-Christian origins of the almanacs and reliance on magic is not the barrier to use in a monastic context that a modern reader might assume, especially given the frequent participation of priests and monks in the facilitation and even the performance of magical rituals’ (1999, 226).

These three areas of settlement and religious activity are typical of Coptic activity in Upper Egypt, in which temples which had been the pagan focus of pre-Coptic towns/settlements were christianised through graffiti as well as through more labour-intensive processes such as monumental church building. There was also a continuity with the pre-Coptic past in the use of the temples as more than religious areas - the defensive capabilities of Djeme had been utilised during the Late Ramesside Period - and a close interplay between religious and residential areas established, as on the east bank.

Desert occupations/settlements

The hills of the western Thebes were crossed by a network of long established paths, linking a great number of sites, from centres of monastic activity to solitary hermitages. Assessing the population of the west bank is complex as there would have been considerable movement between the monasteries and hermitages - a monk may have spent some of the year living amongst his fellow monks, and then spent part of the year in more solitary surroundings, for example, in one of the rock cut tombs high in the

Theban cliffs. Transitory, temporary occupation of certain sites was a fundamental part of living patterns in Coptic Egypt. This was seen above by the way in which the bishops of Armant spent part of the year in western Thebes. A particular site may also only have been occupied during the lifetime of the anchorite inhabiting it, but may have continued to attract pilgrims to the site following the anchorite's death, leading to an accumulation of graffiti.

The Qurn

This hill rises on the south western side of western Thebes, its pyramidal shape forming a backdrop to the west bank (Plate 58), and in height and shape its only rival was Thoth Hill, at the other end of the west bank. During the pharaonic period, the Qurn was seen to be the home of Meretseger, the cobra goddess to whom those in western Thebes addressed their prayers - she was a source of fear to those in Deir el Medina, but could also be appealed to by a repentent person for help (Bruyère 1930). The sanctity of the area continued into the Roman period, referred to by travellers as the 'holy mountain' (Montserrat and Meskell 1997, 183).

The Qurn seems to have been conceptualised by the Copts as a sacred locality as well, and was fully integrated into the lived environment of the west bank - with paths running up its slopes. One of these paths leads up the mountain from Djeme, passing Deir el Medina, and in many of the ostraca discovered on the west bank there are references to the 'hill of Djeme' (Winlock and Crum 1926, 218, see also Kahle 1954, 27-9 for the different meanings of $\tau\omicron\theta\gamma$ - compare Cadell and Rémondon 1967, 344, 347-8 for a similar flexibility in meanings of the Greek $\tau\acute{o} \theta\rho\varsigma$). This could refer to the Qurn, as it lies behind Djeme, but this phrase was also used more generally to refer to the west bank as a whole, as well as more specific locations such as a particular monastery (Winlock and Crum 1926, 108). Indeed, this phrase had been used for the west bank from the Third Intermediate Period onwards (see Vandorpe 1995, 222).

The sanctity of the area around Djeme, including the Qurn, and the hermits and monks living on its slopes, was reiterated through the use of phrases such as the 'Holy Hill' written in Theban ostraca. The precise meaning of this phrase is not known, but it may have been used in a specific, limited way to refer to the Qurn, as well as having a broader meaning for all the religious sites on the west bank. Winlock and Crum (1926, 127) saw its use as perhaps inspired by the psalter, and biblical locations such as the Mount of Olives or Mount Sinai.

As an aspect to the sanctity of the west bank the Qurn may have played an important role. Its very visibility rendered it a central feature of the west bank, and its sacred past may not have been forgotten. As such, it would have made an ideal setting for a religious structure. The majority of the religious sites on the west bank were sited in highly visible locations (see for example Deir el Bakhit), and the actual architecture of the monasteries seemed to desire visibility. Thus the towers which were a feature of monastic cells in western Thebes have been interpreted as not only functional but also symbolic, they 'gave the monasteries a prominent place in a religiously powerful landscape marked by millennia of traditional worship' (Alston 2002, 303). Furthermore, there is archaeological evidence for the Coptic occupation of Thoth Hill, the highest summit on the west bank (see section on Thoth Hill below).

That the summit of the Qurn may have been a location for a church, is suggested by references to the 'church of the summit' in ostraca (Winlock and Crum 1926, 15). The mere act of climbing the Qurn may also have been a religious experience, an act of the devout pilgrim, a central aspect to a journey to Thebes. Each stage of the walk provides a new perspective on the west and east banks, integrating the sites on both banks as well as linking up with other paths leading north west to Deir el Bahri and beyond (Plates 29-36). A few pottery sherds, of the ribbed ware seen elsewhere on the west bank, lie on the slopes of the Qurn, testifying to Coptic activity.

Deir el Roumi

This is a monastic site located in the Valley of the Queens. A pagan sanctuary was built here in the second century CE, which was still active in the fourth century CE. Lecuyot (1993, 263–4) saw the destruction of the sanctuary and the foundation of the monastery as linked, and concluded that: ‘the destruction of the sanctuary is, no doubt, an illustration of the struggle between the last pagans and the first Christians, and the establishment in the necropolis of this monastic community was perhaps also a manner of exorcising the demons’ (1993, 272). Lecuyot’s excavation of Deir el Roumi provided the archaeological evidence for the destruction of the pagan sanctuary, the location of the monastery directly above the sanctuary ruins and the reuse of the sanctuary as building material (1993, 265). These developments in the use of the site may have arisen quite naturally, and may even have involved the same individuals who changed the site as their beliefs changed. At the site of Ashmunein, for example, a fifth century church was built in a temple which had only a short time previously been used as an active pagan shrine (Grossmann and Bailey 1994, 68).

Deir el Roumi, and its associated laurae within the Valley of the Queens, is only a short twenty minutes’ walk from Djeme, although the distance feels greater as the floodplain is left behind and the inhospitable crags and cliffs of the desert hills are approached. The Valley of the Queens is hidden from view until the entrance to the valley is reached, although Deir el Roumi itself was situated in a highly visible location on the west side of the valley, on the southern slope of the hills right at the opening of the valley (Leblanc 1989, fig 9; Lecuyot 1993, 265–6).

Alongside the long-established sanctity of the valley, there may also have been a desire to settle in the valley purely from the point of view of its physical attributes. For the hermits who settled in and around the valley, the ancient tombs provided an ideal

location: a physical challenge was presented by the secluded, craggy heat of the valley, despite its proximity to other settlements and the lushness of the floodplain (Plate 37).

The centre of settlement at the Valley of the Queens, Deir el Roumi, was built around an unfinished pharaonic tomb. It was constructed so that the monastery and its buildings were visible from the valley as well as from Djeme. The buildings were situated between the hillside and a crag (Lecuyot 1993, plan II; Plate 38). The actual area covered by Deir el Roumi is small, approximately 300 metres, but the impression given is one of dense settlement.

Lecuyot divided the monastery into two sections, separated by a 'long vestibule'. To the south side of this vestibule there are four rooms, of unidentified function, although the possible remains of an oven were found in one of the rooms and in the largest room Lecuyot found evidence for an upper floor (1993, 266). It is from this side of the site that a direct view of Djeme can be seen, with the floodplain behind. Whether such a view would have been possible during the occupation of the monastery is unlikely, with its thick mudbrick walls and orientation towards the church, not the floodplain. If, however, as was usual in the patterns of use of domestic space, the flat roof of the monastery was utilised by the monks, then there would have been a panoramic view of the floodplain and the east bank. Perhaps more importantly, its careful location within the Valley of the Queens yet not enclosed by the valley, provided a visible witness to the townspeople of Djeme of the religious endeavours being undertaken around them, frequently by those known to them.

To the other side of the vestibule, on the north, are rooms associated with the church, and the church itself. This was a domed construction (Lecuyot 1993, 267), with the apse facing into the east side of the hill (Plate 39). The church incorporated the centre of the pagan sanctuary, the pharaonic tomb, as an annexe. It may also have had a baptistry, indicated by a room to the south east of the church which contained a large jar

with a cross in raised relief (Lecuyot 1993, 266; Plate 40). How many people were served by this church, and how many resided in the monastery is hard to estimate: the church itself is small, but the monastery would have had an upper floor (Lecuyot 1993, 266). Furthermore, the monastery seems to have been built in two stages, with the southern section built second, at about the end of the sixth century CE at the earliest. This expansion suggests that this formerly pagan site was successfully transformed into a sacred Christian area which continued to attract residents after its initial foundation.

The activity of the monastery is witnessed by ostraca discovered in the rubbish of the monastery; these were written in Demotic, Greek and Coptic and document daily concerns (Lecuyot 1993, 268 see also Wagner et al 1990, 368-9, pl XXVIII). The monks and hermits resident in the valley also undertook to transform other tombs in the valley; painting over the non-Christian tomb paintings, and occupying some of the tombs. Tomb numbers 58 and 60 saw occupation until the eighth century. A chapel and hermitage were built in and around tomb 60, from where textual as well as domestic objects were recovered, and Coptic images were painted on the tomb walls - for example, a cross in room C (Leblanc 1983, 41, 49-52, fig 7, pl V; 1985, 68, pl II; 1989, pl CXLVIII). A clustering of hermitages were also discovered around tombs 98-9, in the valley of Prince Ahmose (Leblanc 1989, 9-11, fig 7, 9, pls XXXV-VII).

The material record indicates that monks were able to occupy successfully what had been an active centre of paganism, an area of pagan worship as well as one in which pagans were buried (Lecuyot 1993, 264). In its place, the monks and hermits created an ideal Christian ascetic landscape, distinctive but yet connected to the other sites on the west bank, including the Valley of the Kings and Djeme (see Leblanc 1989, fig 9). The religious beliefs of the monks and hermits who lived in the valley were reflected by the built environment which they created around themselves. The lifestyles followed by these individuals are typical of the west bank, as well as of Christian communities across Egypt. Certain features re-appear in all the west bank monastic/hermitage sites;

mud-brick buildings, of varying size, based around an ancient tomb/temple, evidence for literate activity and large quantities of ceramic evidence. Depending on the size of the site, there may also be a church and outlying cells in further tombs.

Deir el Medina and Deir Kurnet Murrai

The different areas of settlement on the west bank were connected by a series of paths, established and worn over the centuries right back into pharaonic times (Figure 81). One such path links Djeme with Deir el Medina, the site of the New Kingdom workmen's village (Plate 36). As established by Montserrat and Meskell (1997), this site was occupied during the Graeco-Roman period right through to the Coptic period, and the sacred possibilities of the area had been retained. It was an area for burial as well as worship and domestic life.

Ptolemy IV Philopator and his successors built a temple dedicated to Hathor (of the West), Ma'at, Imhotep and Amenhetep, son of Hapu, having destroyed the temple of Ramesses II which had previously stood on this site. The Coptic occupation of this area involved converting the temple into a church, building a monastery and converting the tombs into hermit cells (Bruyère 1947, 423). The temple was initially cleared and restored in the early twentieth century by Baraize (1914), who listed the items found, including a ball of red cotton from the Coptic period (1914, 41). The temple still bears many traces of its Coptic occupation, and Winlock and Crum (1926, 8) noted that the temple was an ideal location for a church and monastery, given the high enclosure walls and the fact that 'few alterations were needed within to change the temple and the buildings of the pagan priests to the needs of a Christian monastery'.

Some of these adaptations are still visible today, most notably the inscriptions/graffiti on the outside walls of the temple (Plate 41). These were memorials to deceased monks: in the case of the north wall of the temple it appears that the names of the monks

were written directly above their graves (Winlock and Crum 1926, 8). Bruyère excavated the area, and uncovered these graves, which had been excavated first by Baraize (Bruyère 1952, 3). The graffiti on the walls of the temple was not limited to names of monks, for example there are crosses (one in raised relief), as well as a figure (monk) with raised arms and an animal. The Ptolemaic reliefs inside the temple were also adapted by the Copts. For example, inside the temple on the left hand side of the entrance there are three large crosses, painted in red.

The total shift of religiosity in the temple from pagan to Christian is emphasised on the temple's roof, where two monks drew their feet (Plate 42). One set of 'footprints' has the name Abraham written inside both the left and the right foot, with a cross underneath, whilst the other set is simpler, lacking toes. The practice of inscribing feet on a temple roof is well-attested, from both pharaonic and later period Egypt (see Teeter 2002, 3), for example at Karnak (Chevrier 1939, 556) and at Abydos (Caulfield 1902, 11).

The monastery was located within the surrounding walls of the temple, on the north side (Bruyère 1948, 36-8; 1952, 19-20), Winlock and Crum (1926, 9-10) mention that part of the archive of the community was discovered in the nineteenth century but was then dispersed and partially lost. In Bruyère's excavations, a number of artefacts were discovered, such as Coptic ostraca and lamps (1952, 19-20). Just near the temple, with its monastery and church, outside the wall on the south east side, was another church, this one built inside a Ramesside votive chapel (Bruyère 1948, 111-2, fig. 59). The close proximity of these two churches reflects the situation seen in the Luxor temple.

The number places of worship built in Christian sites, close to each other, is striking. At a conference about the monastic site of Kellia, in the western desert, the delegates addressed precisely this issue: 'pourquoi y a-t-il plusieurs églises dans la même agglomération?' (Bridel 1986, 288-90). From this discussion, it emerged that the

actual understanding of what a church was used for in the Coptic period should be addressed, including the possibility that they were used for communal meals (Devos in Bridel 1986, 288). The west bank communities were on a much smaller scale than Kellia, and the churches may have provided one of the few internal spaces in which any large scale gathering could take place.

The placing of relics of holy individuals within a church was also noted as a further reason for a church's continued existence (Bridel 1986, 288). In the monasteries in the Judean desert, churches were built to commemorate an event or a person; memorial churches as opposed to parochial churches, which were built to serve a community of people (Hirschfeld 1992, 16). Memorial churches could become pilgrimage centres in their own right, and stimulate the later development of a monastery. This may have been the case in Thebes as well, and the multiplicity of places of worship should not be seen as surprising. It is a feature of many built environments, from New Kingdom Memphis to contemporary Rome.

It is at Deir el Medina that the proximity of the different settlements and religious buildings on the west bank can be most appreciated. To one side, on the south east on the brow of a hill is Deir Kurnet Murrai, and on the other side, on the north east is a path linking Deir el Medina with other Coptic settlements such as site VII, a hermitage. Deir Kurnet Murrai is only a ten minute's walk from Deir el Medina (Plate 46), up the side of a hill from where there are clear sight lines south to Djeme (Plate 44), north west to the monastery and church in the temple of Hathor, north to site VII and west to the Qurn. Djeme itself is only 30 minutes' walk at the most from Deir Kurnet Murrai. Monks sitting on the roof of the temple of Hathor could be reassured by the christianised landscape around them, seeing their fellow-monks at work at Deir Kurnet Murrai. The location of Deir Kurnet Murrai was highly visible to those on the floodplain and to those in the desert behind (Plates 43 and 45). When Bonomi visited

Thebes in 1830, he made a note of Deir Kurnet Murrai, describing it as 'the convent on the hill with the temple with brick wall' (1914, 82, no 64).

The church located here was dedicated to St Mark (Sauneron 1972; 1973), and was built around a pharaonic tomb (Sauneron 1972, 207). The church seems to have been built in stages; Sauneron stated that some anchorites built a chapel first and then expanded it into a church built along the usual apsidal plan, as well as increasing the living space (1972, 207).

The finds made during the excavations at Deir Kurnet Murrai were considerable. A very large quantity of pottery was uncovered and a large number of sherds remain in the immediate vicinity (Sauneron 1973, 230). Ostraca were numerous as well, with more than two thousand discovered (Sauneron 1972, 207); Coquin has been able to identify the handwriting of Apa Markos in about fifteen texts (see Sauneron 1973, 231). Monks were also buried in the vicinity (Sauneron 1973, 231), and the impression gained of this site is of an area of intense activity, centred upon one monk (Apa Markos), with the apparently small area of the site overshadowed by the extent of the material remains. The location of this religious area was once again focused upon a pharaonic tomb, and the site seems to combine both a commanding physical location as well as the reuse of a pharaonic structure. Even today, the remains of Deir Kurnet Murrai can be seen right across the west bank.

Site VII

This site is on the side of a steep hill and the mudbrick remains of a tower can be seen from a distance. From Deir el Medina, the path descends steeply and cuts across the valley floor, and then climbs again up to this small hermitage (Plates 47-8). Pottery sherds litter the climb up to the hermitage, once the site is reached there is a clear outlook down to the Ramesseum (also occupied by the Copts), across to the east bank

of the Nile (Plate 49), and towards Deir Kurnet Murrai (Plate 50). Winlock and Crum (1926, 10-11) stated that the brick tower would once have been at least ten metres high. Such brick towers were a feature of the Coptic settlements on the west bank built to provide security in times of unrest and also provided storage and living space (Walters 1974, 79, 86). As noted above, however, they may also have been an attempt at creating a visually striking point in the landscape.

The effect in this location would have been very imposing, standing as it does on the foothills of the Qurn, with steep slopes on three sides. The settlement was built directly in front of a Middle Kingdom pharaonic tomb, in its forecourt, all that remains apart from the base of the tower, are piles of rubble and pottery sherds. The inside of the tomb was integrated into the site - inscriptions were left on its walls, and the pharaonic wall paintings were 'defaced' (Winlock and Crum 1926, 11). This site seems to have been a living space for a necessarily small number of monks given the constraints of the location and there is no evidence for a church, although the tomb may have been utilised as a chapel. The exposed nature of this site would have made it an ideal location for monastic reflection and denial.

Sheikh Abd el-Qurna

This hill lies to the north of Site VII, reached by a path leading along the valley floor from Djeme and Deir el Medina, past Site VII and the bottom of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, before ending in Deir el Bahri. Another possible route was through skirting the edge of the floodplain, past the Ramesseum and then turning north west. The second route takes only twenty minutes from Djeme, although those travelling both paths in Coptic times would doubtless have stopped off at the different habitations and devotional locations en route for social, economic and religious purposes.

The hill of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna is filled with private tombs, most originating in the New Kingdom. During the Coptic period, these were occupied in both the short and long term. For example, the forecourts of the tombs were used as workshops, where loom-pits were located on which the monks/hermits could produce textiles (see Tefnin 2002, 6), and the tombs themselves could be lived in. The forecourt of one of these tombs, no. 29, was occupied by Frange, whose links with the rest of Thebes are testified by his letters (see Chapter 4) and by his economic activities: book-binding, rope-making, weaving and leather-work (Boud'hors and Heurtel 2002). The northern and eastern slopes of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, became the nuclei of two monastic establishments, of Epiphanius and of Cyriacus, in which the activities were very similar to those revealed by the recent excavations at tomb no. 29.

Excavations at these monasteries revealed a wealth of material which was published in detail (Winlock and Crum 1926; Crum and White 1926). The vitality of the communities living there and on the west bank as a whole is brought to life by the textual finds as well as the non-textual. The Monastery of Cyriacus was clustered in and around tomb nos. 65-7 (Figure 83; Plate 51). Mudbrick structures can still be seen in the forecourts of some of these tombs, which command a view down to the Ramesseum and beyond. It formed an outlying cell to the Monastery of Epiphanius, and contained within it similar patterns of use, just on a smaller scale.

The centre of settlement of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna radiated from the Monastery of Epiphanius, a short five minute's walk north from the Monastery of Cyriacus (Figure 83). The Monastery of Epiphanius was located both within, and in the forecourt of, tomb 103, the tomb of Daga (Plate 54). Deir el Bahri is situated to the north west of Epiphanius' monastery with a clear visual link between the two (Plate 53). The Monastery of Epiphanius developed in the same way as Deir el Roumi: its development was in stages, initiated by Epiphanius, who then attracted other anchorites to settle nearby (Winlock and Crum 1926, 32; Walters 1974, 10).

The monastery was dominated by two towers, one of three stories high, the other much smaller. The large tower was built over at least two generations, and contained within its mudbrick walls (re-used from the tomb of Mentuemhat) storage areas, grain bins as well as living space (Winlock and Crum 1926, 32-3, pl VI, fig 3; Plate 52). The defensive purpose of the towers was emphasised by Winlock and Crum; when the political situation was stable only the senior members of the community lived within the towers, at unstable times the rest of the community sheltered there as well (1926, 39). A boundary wall also served as both a marker of the monastery lands and as a further defensive precaution (1926, 36-7).

The tomb of Daga was converted into a church, the walls plastered over and suitable texts written upon them. In 1883 Syriac inscriptions were found on the walls of the tomb, one of which was the Lord's prayer (Crum and White 1926, 152-3), and evidence such as this (as the text seemed to have been written in a 'native' hand) was used to show that non-Egyptians lived in the midst of these communities on the west bank (Winlock and Crum, 1926, 140). One of the ostraca had the Syriac alphabet written out on it, and may have been used to teach Syriac to Copts: 'the presumable use of an alphabet thus roughly copied upon a sherd, would be for the teaching of Syriac; the teacher would be some Syrian monk resident at Jême, the pupil someone among his Coptic neighbours' (Winlock and Crum 1926, 140). One of the other texts on the walls of the tomb of Daga was in Coptic, inscribed in red ink on plaster, which was a sermon against heretics (Crum and White 1926, 148-52, 331-7, plate XV). Thus, within the tomb of Daga there was a microcosm of the ideal Coptic world, in which non-Christians or heretics were condemned (whether Egyptian or not).

The scholarly effort which was carried out within the Monastery of Epiphanius is indicated both by the high concentration of written material and by texts such as the Syriac ostrakon above which testify to active learning. Similarly, amongst the Greek

texts discovered, were tables in which Greek verbs were conjugated alongside Coptic verbs. In contrast to the Syriac material, Winlock and Crum did not identify the Greek texts as having been written by non-Egyptians (1926, 143). This statement seems appropriate, given the long integration of Greek alongside Coptic in Egypt (see Chapter 4). Yet Winlock and Crum went on to characterise Greek as a language used and learnt out of necessity, with great reluctance:

‘Greek had remained nothing but a foreign tongue, obligatory still in the conduct of the church services and no doubt unavoidable in dealings with the government’s representatives, but needing to be learnt by such clerics as found some acquaintance with it indispensable’ (1926, 143).

This negative interpretation of the use of Greek is unnecessary (see Chapter 4).

As at the other monastic settlements on the west bank, hermits occupied tombs near the Monastery of Epiphanius, and the majority of the community lived outside its boundary walls. For example, a site identified as Cell B, was a short distance west of Epiphanius’ monastery. It was a dwelling for an anchorite (cave or tomb), and was thus a location for pilgrimage to a sacred person as opposed to a sacred place (see Frank 2000). Forty pilgrims wrote their names and prayers on the walls of this cell, and Winlock and Crum (1926, 43) noted that this site ‘was held in the highest regard by the people of Jême’. The distance between Cell B and the monastery of Epiphanius was negligible but it was nonetheless a pilgrimage site in its own right (Winlock and Crum 1926, 43-4).

A visibly monastic lifestyle was followed by those in the Monastery of Epiphanius, where the occupations were those of monks in the rest of Thebes and across Egypt. For example, textiles as well as shoes were made on the site (Winlock and Crum 1926, 67-78), but more luxurious items could be obtained from further afield. For example, the lack of carpentry tools found at the site (despite the presence of items such as the latticework wooden screens) may indicate that no skilled carpentry was carried out by the monks (Winlock and Crum 1926, 54). An interest in embellishment is attested by fragments of painted pottery found on the site (Winlock and Crum 1926, 91-2; Figure

86). Their religious world can be witnessed in finds such as the designs of mud seals on ribbed amphorae, used for wine, and comparable to those found in Djeme (see above and Winlock and Crum 1926, 80; Figures 84-5). On these seals, were stamped images of individuals praying with upraised hands, as well as crosses and the name of Christ, for example. The monks' environment was thus one in which constant reiteration and affirmation of their self-definition could be found.

On the basis of a lack of evidence (rather than positive evidence) Winlock and Crum (1926, 103) stated that the monastery was not occupied after the second half of the seventh century: 'there is in fact no evidence for the continued existence of this colony of hermits beyond the first half of the seventh century', at around the time of the Muslim conquest. The problems associated with dating the occupational phases of Thebes are such that excavators have revised and reassessed any dates, as in the case of tomb 60 in the Valley of the Queens, initially occupation was thought to have ceased in the seventh century, then it was revised to the eighth century (Leblanc 1983, 52; 1985, 68). Any decline of the monastic settlements on the west bank must have affected the lives of those living in more urban areas, such as Djeme, which continued to exist until the ninth century.

Deir el Bahri

Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, set against the backdrop of sandstone cliffs, forms one of the most imposing structures on the west bank (Plate 55). It commands an outlook over the west bank and down to the east bank, the temple of Karnak directly in its sight lines and linked during the Valley Festival in the New Kingdom (see above). It is not surprising, therefore, that this site was comprehensively re-occupied by the Copts, who built a monastery in the temple at the end of the sixth century. The site is set in a natural amphitheatre, creating a sun-trap and thus combined the rigours of desert life with the transformation of a pagan structure. The foundation of the monastery (Godlewski

1986, 63) may represent a continuation of the Monastery of Phoibammon in the western valley, ten kilometres from Deir el Bahri, which ceased functioning in the late sixth century. The land for the monastery may have been donated by the residents of Djeme (see Godlewski 1986, 49, 63-4). Abraham (see Chapter 4), later Bishop of Armant, was the head of the monastery (Godlewski 1986, 64). Deir el Bahri had been used as a burial site prior to this, with fourth and fifth century CE graves discovered (Godlewski 1986, 48).

The Coptic reclamation of Hatshepsut's temple was so successful that it took a concerted effort on the part of Egyptologists to remove the Coptic monastic buildings. Visible traces of the Coptic life of Hatshepsut's temple are now limited to graffiti on the walls of the temple, and perhaps the erasure of representations of deities on the temple reliefs (Godlewski 1986, 142-52; Wilkinson 2000, 178). Before the excavation of the pharaonic temple, some of the monastic buildings, situated on the upper and middle terraces of the temple remained above ground (Mariette 1890, 1), including a mudbrick tower as seen at Site VII. This survived to eight metres high in the late nineteenth century CE. Naville was the first to undertake the destruction of the Coptic layers - the frontispiece of his publication of the excavation featured a photograph of the monastic buildings including the tower (1894). Winlock (1942, 14) completed the clearing of later additions to the pharaonic temple.

The work of Godlewski (1986) resulted in a comprehensive reconstruction of the Monastery of Phoibammon (1986, plan I), and he catalogued the different finds at the site as well as the Coptic wall paintings and graffiti. The site developed through time, and a change in the location of the chapel (to the Chapel of the Royal cult) may have been due to a need for greater security (Godlewski 1986, 33, 44). Coptic crosses covered the walls of this chapel, and its focus as a pilgrimage site is shown by some of the prayers written up on its walls (Godlewski 1986, 36-8). For example, a priest from the town of Coptos wrote a prayer asking God to have mercy on him - this text dates

from the tenth to the eleventh centuries CE - the ongoing Christian sanctity of the site is also witnessed by other graffiti from the twelfth century CE (Godlewski 1986, 33-36, 143, no. 8). The energy put into the creation of this monastic centre is demonstrated by the removal of the drums of sandstone columns from the Ramesseum (Barwik 1991, 19). These were used as basins in the monastery.

On the lower terrace of the temple were a series of rooms, which Godlewski thought housed those who were connected to the monastery, but not actually part of it (1986, 46). These were people who had been donated to a monastery when children (see Chapter 4), but who did not enter the monastic order, instead carrying out a variety of tasks for the monks (such as agriculture). Within the broad monastic area of Deir el Bahri, therefore, a variety of lifestyles could be followed, stretching from the non-monastic to the hermit. Yet the material finds from the site show a unity of expression and style similar to the rest of Thebes. For example, drawings on ostraca (Godlewski 1986, 108-14) include motifs recognisable from graffiti and engraved stones, the wooden furniture is similar to that in the Monastery of Epiphanius (Godlewski 1986, 119-22), as are the pottery, amphorae as well as painted fragments (Godlewski 1986, 124-33). Much of the Coptic textual material discussed in Chapter 4, of general Theban provenance, was probably recovered illicitly from this site, as was the archive of documents about Djeme (Crum and Steindorff 1912); ostraca, with letters on, continue to be found there (see Godlewski 1986, 134-40).

A monastic landscape was created in this natural amphitheatre. Much Coptic graffiti, in which individuals cut their names into the rocks, or crosses and drawings, survives from the rocks immediately above Deir el Bahri (Rzepka 2000, 230-1). A tomb in these rocks may have been used as a hermitage by monks from Deir el Bahri, who are also probably responsible for the graffiti (Rzepka 2000, 230-1). Such patterns of use extend from Deir el Bahri to the Monastery of Epiphanius, on its southern side, and to the rock cut tombs of eleventh dynasty on its northern side, which were occupied by

hermits. From Deir el Bahri a path climbed along this hillside, passing by these tombs and reaching Deir el Medina to the south and the Valley of the Kings to the north west. This path is still used today, and provides a spectacular overview of the west and east banks. Traces of the monastic occupation of these tombs included ostraca and leather sandals (Carter 1912, 22). For example, from Site XX ostraca were recovered, including letters addressed to Epiphanius (of the Monastery of Epiphanius) (see Winlock and Crum 1926, 20).

The Valley of the Kings

The walk between Deir el Bahri and the Valley of the Kings is short (20 minutes) but steep, and, as at Deir el Roumi, the tombs in the Valley of the Kings were lived in by monks, anchorites and hermits and also used for contemporary burials (see stela BM 409, Lefebvre 1907, 71). This site, although reached relatively easily from Deir el Bahri, feels much more isolated than Deir el Roumi. Once more the physical landscape of the valley must have appeared ideal to those wishing to follow a religious life in its midst.

The tomb of Ramses IV, was identified by Winlock and Crum (1926, 18-9) as having the most important evidence for Coptic occupation, and the tomb itself had been a much visited site before the Coptic period. In the forecourt of the tomb were found Coptic structures, including an oven and two granaries, beside a domestic building. There were also amphorae for storing honey beside these structures, inside which there was still some honeycomb. Inside the tomb there was considerable evidence for visitors to the anchorites dwelling there. They left their names on the walls of the tomb, and wrote prayers (Davis and Ayrton 1908, 6-8; Winlock and Crum 1926, 19).

The tombs themselves could become places of worship and the sanctity which the Copts wished to impose on these tombs is shown by the fact that few accessible tombs

were left without some sort of Christian graffiti (Winlock and Crum 1926, 19-20; Weeks 1998, 53). Any archaeologist working in the tombs of western Thebes faced (and faces) the Coptic period occupation/alterations done to these tombs. Weeks' recent discovery of tomb KV 5 encountered Coptic pottery sherds throughout the labyrinthine tomb, in every chamber - even in the most apparently impenetrable sections of the tomb (2000, 119). These sherds included parts of a cooking pot and an amphora (2000, 125). The deposition patterns of ceramics reflect what now seem to have been unusual activity. It is hard to understand why an individual would penetrate the very depths of a tomb, using and leaving large quantities of pottery, in an atmosphere which would have been dark, close and full of potential danger.

Carter's account of his survey in the mountains to the west of the Valley of the Kings described the location of a number of tombs: 'at the head of the numerous valleys that here abound tombs are hidden, generally in the innermost recesses, clefts and crevices, some however being cut high up in the rock-faces of the perpendicular cliffs' (1917, 107). In these apparently inaccessible locations, anchorites settled and Coptic visitors/pilgrims left their graffiti (Quibell 1906, 9; Carter 1917, 108-109, 112-4, plan XIX; Plate 57).

Deir el Bakhit

As seen above, Deir el Bahri was surrounded by monastic/anchorite settlements - its approach from the valley floor meant walking past such settlements on either side. At the southern end of this approach, on the summit of the hill named Dra' Abu el Naga (Plate 56), was located what Winlock and Crum (1926, 21) termed 'one of the most considerable Christian monasteries of Western Thebes'. This has not been excavated (Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 206), and much of the remains were cleared away (Winlock and Crum 1926, 21). Yet Winlock and Crum (1926, 21) described the evidence left on the site; a cemetery of 50-100 graves, pottery, ostraca (120 were taken

to the Berlin Museum) and some mudbrick walls. The boundaries of the monastic lands were marked by stone cairns, in the shape of crosses (Winlock and Crum 1926, 21).

From the summit of Dra' Abu el Naga, the monastery commanded an extensive outlook over both west and east banks, mirroring the position of Deir Kurnet Murrai, and connecting the valley floor settlements with those in the desert.

Quarry settlement

A short distance north east of Dra' Abu el Naga, is the opening to the valley which forms the Valley of the Kings. Crossing the flat floor of this valley, and turning east, north of 'Elwat ed Dibban, there is a small valley in which stone was quarried from the 26th Dynasty to the Roman period. From Dra' Abu el Naga the walk takes about thirty minutes, and during the Coptic period the quarry was extensively occupied (Petrie 1909c, plate IV; Plate 59).

The quarry workings, and the underground chambers were reused by the Copts who built mudbrick walls and created small rooms. Crosses were painted on the walls, and there was also a prayer to the Twelve Apostles (Winlock and Crum 1926, 22). Small finds were also made, for example, Gauthier discovered ostraca and pottery, and Winlock and Crum noted that the 'surface is littered with evidences of Coptic occupation' (1926, 22). In Petrie's publication of his work in Qurna, he published a picture of a painted fragment of a Coptic jar, found in the quarry (1909c, LVI).

Connected to the above settlement were a row of houses built on the side of the valley, Coptic pottery providing evidence of their occupation. These sites were not discussed by Petrie, but he did publish photographs of a Coptic hermitage and 'pillar dwelling', without clear contexts given (1909c, pl LIII).

The two pre-Coptic watchtowers located north of the quarry, on steep slopes either side of the Farshut road, were reoccupied by Coptic anchorites, and provided a vantage point over the west bank. The anchorites who lived in these watchtowers were able to see more densely occupied areas, such as Deir el Bakhit, but were also able to follow a more isolated life (see Petrie 1909c, as well as Winlock and Crum 1926, 23).

Thoth Hill

The quarry settlement mentioned above, along with its associated hermitages, formed an approach to the path to Thoth Hill (Plates 57 and 59). This hill is the highest peak on the west bank, surrounded by a series of 'labyrinthine wadis' (Vörös and Puddleiner 1997a, 283), and can be reached by a steep walk of about two hours from the quarry settlement. The path is such that pack animals cannot walk along it (Vörös 1998, 17). Petrie emphasised the accessibility of the site: 'all I could hear from residents was that there were some Coptic walls on it. Yet it is by no means inaccessible' (1909c, 5).

On the summit of the hill, the excavators have discovered the remains of an Early Dynastic stone temple dedicated to Horus, on top of which was built a Middle Kingdom temple built by Sankhare Mentuhotep (Petrie 1909c, pl V; Vörös and Puddleiner 1997a; 1997b; Vörös 1998). In addition a Sed festival palace of Sankhare Mentuhotep was located there. The further development of Thoth Hill as a site for devotion to Hathor may have been a result of the hill's location, close to the expeditionary route from Thebes to Farshut. For those going on such expeditions, it would have been an appropriate place to deposit offerings to Hathor, a goddess responsible for roads and expeditions (Puddleiner 2001, 245).

The site was not used again until the Coptic period (Vörös 1998, 61). Petrie noted the Coptic occupation of the summit of Thoth Hill (1909c, 5), and the recent excavations

found further evidence of the Copts (Vörös and Pudleiner 1997a, 284, 287; Vörös 1998, 35, 61). This evidence included large quantities of Coptic amphorae, as well as defaced statues of Thoth and limestone crosses, similar to those found in the temple of Seti I. Vörös (1998, 61) dated the reoccupation of Thoth Hill by the Copts to the fourth and fifth centuries CE, and attributed it to a group of anchorites.

Thoth Hill, along with the Qurn, dominated the landscape of west and eastern Thebes - the two hills providing focus points and the most visible witness to the christianisation of the area (Plate 57). Vörös (1998, 64) hypothesised that Sankhare Mentuhotep built his Sed festival palace on this vantage point precisely because of its commanding physical location: 'the people of the capital could see the heights to which their virile ruler had to climb'. As at the Qurn, the pyramidal shape of the summit was also an inspiration for the ancient Egyptians: Vörös (1998, 65) stated that the temple was the equivalent of the pyramidion, the tip of a pyramid. For the Copts, this site with its mudbrick pylons may have presented a challenge; the physical impact of this location was such that its pagan past needed to be transformed into an active Christian site - its visibility such that it provided a constant reminder to those living and working on the east and west banks of the anchorites' struggle on their behalf.

The lengths to which the Coptic anchorites were prepared to go to transform the rock cut pharaonic tombs of the west bank were highlighted by Vörös' (1998, 65-74) discovery of a tomb situated on the north side of Thoth Hill. This tomb may have been built for Sankhare Mentuhotep, and its location reflects that of the entrance to a pyramid. The tomb is located halfway up a cliff of 35 metres, and could only be accessed by the excavators through the use of ropes and ladders (see photograph pages 70-1). The Copts had converted the tomb into a chapel (perhaps during the fourth century), with a brightly coloured life-size painting of Christ Pantocrator, crosses and symbols of the four evangelists as well as numerous Coptic graffiti - 'hundreds of lines of Coptic text had been scratched into the rock walls' (Vörös 1998, 74).

The pilgrimage landscape of Thebes

During the pharaonic period, Thebes had been one of the most populous and vibrant cities in the near east, yet, even during its heyday in the New Kingdom it was a city whose 'economic well-being' was dependent, in part, on its 'religious and funerary functions' (Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 8). In the Coptic period, Thebes seems once more to have become an area in which intense religious activity was the main-stay of the communities resident there, despite the fact that this was an area which had no links with the biblical past. On both sides of the Nile, monastic communities were juxtaposed with non-monastic settlements, and, as in the pharaonic period, there was a wealth of sacred sites, with churches almost adjoining one another in some locations. The literary image presented by the *Historia Monachorum* seems to have been created in the midst of one of the most famous and visible pharaonic districts - a place once visited for its non-Christian sites.

The paganism of the inhabitants seems also to have been successfully quelled, as the population became Christian, and sought to leave their sacred symbols all over Thebes - on ancient buildings, in caves, as well as on the door lintels of their houses. During an era of political change, those in Thebes expressed their identity and put great investment into the development and maintenance of areas of worship, and also supported those who chose to become monks or hermits. It was from the non-monastic communities that people came from in order to become monks, with some monks leaving behind families, wives and children in the more urbanised areas.

Thebes also attracted residents from outside its immediate vicinity. Pilgrims from beyond Thebes left graffiti recording their presence in Thebes. The motivation for pilgrimages and settlement within Thebes seems to have arisen from a desire to see well-known monks and hermits, to benefit from their sanctity, as well as to be in the

midst of what had become a religious landscape. Pilgrimage as a religious act was encouraged by religious leaders and the Coptic church (see Walters 1974, 36; Viaud 1979, 1; Basilios 1991, 1324), which allowed pilgrimage to churches as an alternative to visiting Jerusalem itself (which had a Coptic community). For Egyptian Muslims, Aswan became a place of pilgrimage, a substitute for visiting Mecca (see Budge 1920, 98).

Thebes mirrored monastic and pilgrimage landscapes in other parts of the Middle East, as well as within Egypt (compare Mount of Temptation, Jericho - Plate 63). In the Sinai desert, at the site in which Moses received the ten commandments, a whole pilgrimage landscape was created (Coleman and Elsner 1994). St Catherine's monastery at the foot of the mountain, on the site of the 'burning bush' was both the start and end point of a climb to the summit of Mount Sinai, a climb which was turned into a religious act. As at Thebes, the mountain was occupied by hermits who could be visited on the way to the summit and at the top was a church (compare with the Qurn and Thoth Hill). The Judean desert in Palestine was also settled by monks and hermits between the fourth and seventh centuries CE, and became a 'cosmopolitan centre' (Patrich 1995, 7), with monasteries and hermitages in close proximity, and Jerusalem a day's walk away. Here, Patrich identified the physical landscape as being central to the location of the monasteries (Plate 62), as well as the importance of individual monks in inspiring others to locate nearby (1995, 7- 10).

The apparent accessibility and proximity of the monasteries of the Judean desert is seen at Thebes as well, although the actual impression given by the Coptic buildings at Thebes may have been the reverse. Boundary walls surrounded the monasteries and hermitages, some of them having towers as well, in theory delineating very clearly the monastic and non-monastic space, but in practice the boundaries must have been more fluid. At the Monastery of Epiphanius, for example, over half the community actually lived outside the walls, in outlying cells (Winlock and Crum 1926, 39).

How far the non-monastic of Thebes were allowed access to the monasteries and hermitages is questionable. Access to the 'holy men' of Thebes may have been a privilege. The non-monastic of Thebes may have been consigned to a supportive role, bringing food and water to the desert hermits, but otherwise not participating in the religious endeavours of those who surrounded the non-monastic residential locations. The graffiti seen in the hermit cells may only have thrived after the death of a particular hermit, and there would have been a continual ebb and flow in the hermitages of the west bank, as cells fell into disuse and decline - at no time would the sites discussed have all seen a simultaneous level of use. The frequent recourse to letter writing (see Chapter 4), in which people of Djeme appealed for help from monks may partly have arisen out of just such an inaccessibility.

Tracking any patterns of access in Coptic Thebes is as complex as for New Kingdom Memphis. The graffiti, both pictorial and written, left across the Theban sites, certainly attest to patterns of movement and to the desire of some individuals to visit religious sites/people or to endow a previously pagan site with Christianity. Yet the content of the graffiti follows certain set themes, apparently always with a religious basis, implying that a certain perception of the purpose of graffiti endured.

Within the domestic context, in the houses of Djeme, individuals wrote their names and a prayer, and some of their possessions were similarly marked (Edgerton 1934, 127; Hölscher 1954, 47). Even though this was in a private domestic setting, the content was religiously motivated and limited in outlook. Similarly, further graffiti written in the temple buildings in Medinet Habu primarily recorded the name of the individual and/or a prayer (Edgerton 1937). This pattern is reflected across east and west Thebes, where a person's name, a prayer or a cross with Christ's name were the most frequent form of graffiti (see for example Deir el Bahri - Godlewski 1986, 28). The vigour with which the ancient Egyptians traversed the west bank at Thebes, placing graffiti in

difficult to access locations was matched in the Coptic period, where Coptic graffiti were written alongside ancient Egyptian graffiti (Sadek 1972, plate CLXXXIII). This may have resulted from a desire to cancel out the power of the ancient writings by placing Coptic texts alongside, but has also been analysed as the continuation, and not the rejection, of ancient practices. They form 'témoins importants de la persistance des rites pharaoniques dans l'Égypte chrétienne' (Coque, Debono et al 1972, II).

In theory, it should have been possible for anyone with any degree of literacy to leave graffiti freely, covering any range of issues and including a whole range of images (for which literacy was not a pre-requisite), but instead the placement of graffiti seems to have involved a similar degree of restriction (self-imposed or not) as in the New Kingdom. Considering Badawy's estimate of a population of almost 20,000 living in Djeme at any one time, even reducing the estimate by half leaves a huge population base with the potential to leave graffiti of any sort. Yet the number of graffiti covering five centuries of occupation does not seem to be representative of that population base, even given the proviso that any extant graffiti are but a small proportion of the original number. Perhaps merely to write graffiti, or to draw an image, formed part of a privileged activity in Thebes, and was a purely religious experience. Thus it was the fortunate pilgrim who was permitted to visit a holy site, and the even more fortunate pilgrim who could write a prayer requesting assistance. Participation in the christianisation of Thebes may have been reserved for those committed to the religious life. It may have been something carried out whilst others laboured in the fields, unconcerned about the christianisation of the desert hills, tombs and temples around them.

The most visible amongst the religious communities in western Thebes are men, with the graffiti recording endlessly the names of monks, and with the ostraca similarly dominated by monks, priests or bishops. Yet, as seen in Chapter 4, a not insignificant proportion of letters involved the female voice. Women were just as able as men to

write to members of the religious communities, and could themselves live out the religious life as nuns (see Wilfong 1998a, 125-6 - who also noted the complaints made by monastic communities about nuns). Thus some of the letters were actually written to women (Winlock and Crum 1926, 131). On the basis of this evidence Winlock and Crum (1926, 132) argued that there were interactions between monks/hermits on the west bank and women. This was further enabled through the practice of some ascetes in abandoning their family in order to live as a hermit/monk (see Chapter 4). Some form of contact could be retained, however. Access for women to the religious communities in Thebes need not have been any harder than it was for men; although a letter requesting a monk go to the Monastery of Phoibammon in order to reprimand a monk who had brought women into the monastery demonstrates both the accessibility of monasteries for women, and the disapproval with which this could be met (Winlock and Crum 1926, 134; Bucking 1997, 4).

The close interconnection between the religious and lay communities of Thebes is, however, demonstrated by the decline and eventual abandonment of western Thebes. The town of Djeme was deserted in the ninth century, and various reasons have been put forward for this, Lefebvre stated that the inhabitants of Djeme fled to Esna in the seventh century, presumably in the face of the Muslim conquest (1907, 69). As documents reveal (see Schiller 1932, 56-63), however, the town continued to exist after the Muslim conquest so the two events cannot be directly linked. Instead it seems preferable to look at the resulting economic hardships as well as the gradual incorporation of a new religious ideology as being behind the abandonment of western Thebes (see Ye'or 1996).

In contrast to the ascetic principles and motivations behind the monastic movement, the existence of the monasteries was partly dependent upon the motivations and priorities of the lay communities in Thebes. The investment, in terms of labour, land and monetary endowments, necessary for the foundation of a monastery or church was

considerable, and would only have been forthcoming when the religious motivation of a community was at its height. Indeed, the beneficial taxation system under which monks were exempt from poll tax came to an end in 868 (see Cannuyer 1996, 39-40), crucially affecting the size and importance of the monastic movement. Once the role of monasteries as major employers, as the arbiters and controllers of rural and urban life, could no longer be fulfilled, then inevitably their influence began to decline. Religious ideology was not enough to sustain them. Financial and political reasons were seen as the root cause of the decline and abandonment of Kellia (see Bridel 1986, 327), probably in the middle of the eighth century (see Bonnet 1986, 298).

The economic benefits brought by pilgrims were also such as to sustain the monastic population; for example hermits living beyond the floodplain relied on gifts (Winlock and Crum 1926, 145). The lack of pilgrims to the Judean desert monasteries in the seventh century and later deprived them of an important source of income - these monasteries were not to be revived until the nineteenth century, when the pride of the Greek Orthodox church and the biblical location of the monasteries demanded their restoration (Patrich 1995, 9). A similar situation may have come about in Thebes, where, despite the certainties in religious beliefs (see Chapter 4) and the energy invested into the christianisation of the landscape, it was possible for all to be abandoned. Thus it remained, with religious graffiti in Arabic eventually overlaying the Coptic (see Vörös 1998, 74), and with no religious or political motivation to revive the monastic centres of Thebes, as was the case in the Judean desert and in Wadi Natrun. Yet on the east bank at Thebes the Christian religious life was to prosper enough for a bishopric to be created in the eleventh century.

Conclusion

The religious sanctity granted to the Theban landscape during the pharaonic era created generations of occupants whose purpose was to maintain this religious landscape. The

Copts tapped into this religiosity, which despite spurning the past also provided a continuum with it. In its place the new self-definition of the Thebans was expressed in the built environment, as paganism was slowly rejected. The intervisibility between the religious sites on the two banks of Thebes established during the pharaonic period was maintained, with Christian buildings constructed in highly visible locations.

The picture created in the *Historia Monachorum* of a landscape dominated by the monastic could be said to be relevant to Thebes, where the outstanding features of the physical and the built environment, such as Thoth Hill and the temple of Karnak, were incorporated into a new world-view. Furthermore, for the residents of Thebes the main point of reference was frequently the monastic world. Some of this, however, was due not only to a need for spiritual guidance, but also to the role of monasteries as the major landowners.

It was also a location which attracted non-Theban visitors and residents, where the main concerns were heretical rather than national differences. The multiplicity of religious locations across both west and east banks is reminiscent of New Kingdom Memphis. Both settlements were based in landscapes of historical and visual significance, in the midst of which certain residents found meaning - either the inspiration to revere and renovate or to adapt and reinterpret. Likewise, there was a pattern of cultural forms and domestic patterns with little variation.

Despite the undeniable investment in the religious life by the Thebans, the participation in this process does not seem to have been universal. Individuals may have remained within certain self-imposed boundaries; for example the residents of Djeme may only rarely have ventured into the desert hills, taking little interest in the christianisation of their landscape. This is only conjectured from the lack of evidence from the non-religious of Thebes, and from the lack of concern with religious issues as demonstrated in ostraca from Djeme. Other boundaries were imposed through the delineation of

monastic and non-monastic space with the building of monastic walls. The crossing of such boundaries may have been dependent upon the status/occupation of an individual.

Certainly, the gradual rejection of the area as a site for urban and monastic settlement and pilgrimage seems to indicate the inability of an ideological system to withstand political and economic pressures, despite the assertiveness with which it had been promulgated across Egypt. The confident expressions of self-definition seen in a variety of textual sources and in the christianisation of Thebes became instead the beliefs of a not insignificant minority.

CONCLUSION

Entering the worlds of New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt should not result in a contrast between an 'over-obedient society' (Braudel 2001, 86) and a dynamic, Christian environment. Instead, a far more nuanced understanding of the formulation of self in these two periods is necessary. The imposition of self-definition was of central relevance to both periods, and inevitably involved compromise, inconsistency and variability.

It is also crucial to question accepted approaches to the study of ancient self-definition, and to resist attempts to mould Egypt's past into a model of multi-ethnic life attractive to research funding and modern preoccupations. Instead the primary evidence itself needs to be prioritised in order to question the generalizations which can remain in Egyptological literature. These generalizations have been all too easily promoted outside the Egyptological domain, and used to 'prove' sociological/anthropological models of ancient civilizations (see Smith A, 1993). Egypt's past should not be manipulated or removed from its context to suit theoretical arguments and political agendas. As has been demonstrated in the preceeding chapters, an unexpected world lived alongside the expected, and in discovering this, the evidence was central.

As far as possible, this evidence has been examined on its own terms. For example, the categories of race/ethnicity have been discarded in this thesis. This has enabled a more rounded, reflective and less loaded idea of self/other to emerge. It has also exposed the ways in which presumptions have been repeatedly made about ethnicities despite the utter lack of evidence (as in New Kingdom Memphis). For Coptic Egypt, the necessity of studying source material stemming from a variety of settings, not only the Christian, has been highlighted. This has demonstrated the subjectivity with which Christian as opposed to non-Christian 'behavioural patterns' have been identified by later interpreters.

At the same time, some of the New Kingdom and Coptic evidence can seem very modern, apparently coinciding with some of the material discussed in Chapter One. The importance of 'home' in creating as vital an aspect to Egyptian identity as broader entities such as the state or religious beliefs seems to relate very closely to present day ideas. This is also the case with the tension caused by movement from home or by the threat posed by outsiders (however defined). Such perceived intersections between past and present may not be meaningful in themselves. It is thus vital to reiterate the point that we can never really know what it meant to be an Egyptian of the New Kingdom or of the Coptic period, even though theoretical insights might seem to widen our horizons and to fill the gaps in the evidence plausibly.

It is not only the gaps in the ancient evidence which have long troubled Egyptologists, but also the lack of cohesion between different types of sources. This has been highlighted in this thesis, where archaeological and written evidence do not necessarily coincide and where apparently contradictory statements can be discerned within source types. Despite the difficulty which this situation presents, in that it makes it more problematic to comprehend the Egyptian past, it also reinforces the complexity of these distant worlds.

This complexity requires that emphasis is placed upon the inconsistencies which result from any formalised attempts at self-definition by a powerful group, whether in what now appears as a tightly defined unitary world (New Kingdom Egypt) or in a world of fundamentally opposed identities (Coptic Egypt). Studying these two contrasting political contexts alongside each other has brought this issue to the fore. It leads to the question of why ideologies of self/other are consistently generated by those with power when their efficacy can only ever be limited. In New Kingdom Egypt, an environment in which continuity was promoted, the deceptive clarity of official ideologies of self/other had limited impact in times of weak political power. Likewise, in Coptic

Egypt, an era of apparently intense personal religious experience, such expressions of self-definition ultimately could not endure as majority beliefs when in unfavourable contexts. Doubtless, stability and purpose were enhanced through the acceptance of a rigid self-definition, yet this was not (and could not be) enough.

This failure at the heart of the self-definition of a society or a state is reflected in the textual sources examined in this thesis. These were generated and written by a minority sector of the population, including those who promoted the acceptance of a certain social order. Despite this, any reference points for self-definition were flexible. In New Kingdom Egypt the king could delineate borders between order and disorder, asserting his power, but at the same time acknowledge his dependence upon those from the allegedly disordered world. The contrast between order and disorder could be felt within the borders of New Kingdom Egypt, and formed part of an accepted literary topos. The New Kingdom state as one defined in terms of a rigid hierarchy of deities, king and officials was nonetheless one in which discontent could be expressed. In Coptic Egypt, the concerns of rival religious groups which created opposing senses of self-definition, could then be by-passed in some of the letters discussed above, where individuals defined themselves more in terms of their social situation, whether it was poverty, widowhood or ill-health. Dogmatic assertions of the correct conduct of life could also be met by reluctance and failure, and definition of who should be identified as a source of disorder was subjective and fluid. In both New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt, these hints of failure are revealed despite the fact that the sources are, for the most part, derived from those to whom the success of a coherent self-definition mattered most.

Nevertheless, any interpretation of self-definition must include the high degree of conformity in New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt. Thus, when the New Kingdom Egyptian wrote a letter, she/he drew upon themes current in other forms of text. An individual defined her/himself in a hierarchical framework, with reference points

formed by the deities and/or the king. The resulting unity of expression and belief creates a striking image of conformity which is matched in Coptic period letters, although here the unity of expression could cross those of different belief systems. At the same time, however, the self-definition of an individual in the Coptic period could reinforce a sense of group identity which drew from other textual sources current in Egypt.

The overwhelming impact which a society's self-definition can have on a more individual level is further suggested by the lived environment of Egypt. In the monumental areas of the New Kingdom urban environment, a vivid witness to the official Egyptian perception of the world was created. Likewise, the Coptic Christian urban environment affirmed and reiterated a Christian identity, even during a period of non-Christian political control. The level of conformity in the material record with the dominant cultural forms in New Kingdom Egypt is so high that uncovering other forms of cultural expression is a rare event, and thus all too often linked with the action of a non-Egyptian. This silence in the material record need not be reflective of a real situation. Thus an open mind should be retained about what constitutes Egyptian/non-Egyptian behaviour. The inconsistencies which the evidence reveals *despite* the striking conformity in the material and written record should not be overlooked.

Ultimately, therefore, it cannot be presumed that there was a widespread level of engagement with ideologies of self-definition current during the New Kingdom or the Coptic Period. This is a question which needs instead to be left open. In a strongly centralised society, such as New Kingdom Egypt, much of the evidence referring to the articulation of self relates only to a privileged minority. It is thus only to this minority that many of the activities affirming an Egyptian sense of identity can be securely attributed. Such activities include the dedication of votive offerings or the deposition of graffiti on more ancient monuments. Even in the relatively de-centralised environment of Coptic Egypt, in a christianised environment, it seems to have been those leading a

religious life who were most able (or the most motivated) to participate in certain aspects of the christianisation of their landscape. Issues of access were not limited to the more centralised world of New Kingdom Egypt.

It was in these limited sectors of New Kingdom and Coptic Egypt that a public self-justification seemed to have mattered the most. In this, the Egyptian past could be a defining feature, whether as something to be admired or as something to be condemned. The contrast resulting from studying these two periods alongside one another can reveal a similarity; not of events but of issues. Both periods serve to illustrate the many contingencies (for example, someone's status, occupation or political/religious setting) on which self-definition can depend, and the caution with which any source material should be approached. Just as New Kingdom Egypt was not solely populated by unthinking individuals who viewed themselves and the world in terms of bland oppositions, neither was Coptic Egypt an environment in which religious dogmatism was all-encompassing.

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